THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE

VOLUME 3
March 2020

The MIGHTY CRUSADERS

THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE

Volume 1, Number 3 March 2020

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Red Rube and More.....1
by Rik Offenberger
(GASP!).....7
How a science-fiction movie from 1958 led to my becoming a fan of Golden Age MLJ Comics!
by Gary McCullough
Last Days of the Fly!!, Part 2.....34
by Daniel St. John

Rik Offenberger Editor-in-Chief
Jim Burrows Editor & Production
Earl Wajenberg, Copy Editor
Jon Singer, Copy Editor
Ron Krueger, Copy Editor

Cover art by Greg Agustin

The Shield G-Man Club Fanzine
Published occasionally by
G-Man Comics.
12973 Saddleback Place,
Chino CA 91710.

"MLJ" characters featured herein and related elements, logos, symbols, etc. are all registered trademarks of Archie Comics Publications Inc, unless otherwise stated and are used without permission. No copyright infringement is intended. THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE understands and recognizes the right of Archie Comics to enforce ownership of these trademarks, and does not dispute this. THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE believes that everything contained herein falls within the fair use clause of Trademarks and Copyrights, and pledges full cooperation with Archie Comics to protect its trademarks. THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE is in no way affiliated with, recognized, sponsored, approved or authorized by Archie Comics. The opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of Archie Comics. THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE serves as a non-profit scholarly work, which reviews, promotes, and documents all elements of "MLJ" in all media. This magazine is a free PDF download. Print copies are available from the printer, Ka-Blam with no profits paid content creators or editorial staff. Some illustrations and words are the creation of others, and may or may not have appeared in other publications or web sites. Their inclusion in THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE is not intended as an infringement of their copyright in any way but rather is done in the interest of documenting and reviewing pieces of comic book history within the fair use clause of Trademarks and Copyrights. "MLJ" and other related properties and images are TM & © by Archie Comics, the Fly and Lancelot Strong are TM & © Joe Simon Properties, !mpact is TM & © DC Comics. Ruby Red Copyright © 2019 Jim Burrows, Mister Satan & Red Rube Not Copyright, public domain character. THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE holds no Trademarks or Copyrights of any kind to any information on this site.

Printed in the U.S.A. by Ka-Blam

This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition, nor affixed to, nor as part of any advertising literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

meets—well—The Black Hood. Although each of the heroes already seemed to have been aware of the other crimefighter, the story made it clear that this was their first time to actually meet, and they revealed their true identities to each other. The plot is mostly a Cold War spy yarn which I thought was pretty intriguing, but Giunta's artwork simply blew me away. The double-page spread at the center of the book, with the two heroes causing havoc with the gang of spies, was simply mind-blowing.

A MOMENT LATER, ON THE GROUND, AS THE FLY RIPS A BRONZE STATUE FROM ITS PEDESTAL...
THEY SAY THE FLY HAS THE STRENGTH OF A BILLION ANTS, THE WORLD'S STRONGEST CREATURE FOR ITS SIZE! AND HE PROVED IT! HE TORE THAT STATUE OFF ITS BASE!
WHILE THE BLACK HOOD IS LAUNCHING A GROUND ATTACK, I'LL BLITZ THE ROGUES WITH AN AERIAL "CAVALRY" CHARGE!
HIMMEL! OUR CAR IS WRECKED! CRUSHED BEYOND REPAIR!
WE CAN'T DEFEAT THE BLACK HOOD AND THE FLY!
TAKE REFUGE IN THAT FRUIT TREE ORCHARD!
SHORTLY, IN THE NEARBY GROVE...
ONCE AGAIN I'LL USE MY INSECT HERITAGE TO FRUSTRATE THESE ASSASSINS! LIKE A GIANT BEE, I HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A HUGE QUANTITY OF HONEY BY POLLINATING FRUIT TREES AND OTHER PLANTS!
NOW I'LL BOMBARD THE PUNKS WITH A FLOOD OF STICKY HONEY! I'LL COVER THEM WITH IT FROM HEAD TO TOE!
(GASP!) I CAN'T MOVE! I'M STUCK TO THE GROUND!
THE FLY # 7
Page 16
THE FLY # 7
Page 17

John Giunta art from *Adventures of the Fly # 7*

No background to the Black Hood was given—I can assure you that, at the age of ten, I had no idea that there had ever been a "Golden Age of Comics," so naturally I had no knowledge that the Black Hood had been a part of it. At the time, for me, he was just a costumed crimefighter wearing a yellow outfit with red gloves, trunks, and boots, and a black hood. His alter-ego was Kip Burland, police officer. As he had no special powers or abilities whatsoever, I'm not sure what my fascination with him was, but the Black Hood immediately became a favorite character.

This issue was special for other reasons. *Adventures of the Fly #7 was the first comic book that I read,* ***and then saved!*** This issue also prompted me to ask my parents for 60 cents so that I could send off for a *one-year subscription!* Thanks to this one book, I became ***a comic collector!***

Fly #8 was the first subscription issue to arrive in my mailbox, and I was introduced to yet another new costumed hero—the Shield. Like the Black Hood in the previous issue, no background information was given; not even The Shield's real-life identity was provided. It wasn't apparent in this story that the Shield had any special powers or abilities. If he seemed in any way familiar to me, it was because his costume

FLY. 5-P25.
BOBBY BELL'S JUDO PAGE
1 ATTACKER HAS GRIPPED YOUR LEFT WRIST WITH BOTH HANDS. PUT YOUR RIGHT HAND BETWEEN HIS ARMS AND TAKE HOLD OF YOUR OWN LEFT FIST.
2 TAKE HALF A STEP FORWARD ON LEFT FOOT, BENDING KNEE ENOUGH TO BRING LEFT FOREARM DIRECTLY UNDER ATTACKERS HANDS...
3 PUSH UP WITH FIST AND STRAIGHTEN KNEE TO BREAK HOLD...
4 WHILE HE'S OFF BALANCE HIT HIM ON THROAT WITH THE EDGE OF YOUR LEFT HAND...
HERE'S HOW THE SHIELD BROKE THE GRIP ON HIS FOREARMS BY THE Robot
1 WHEN GRABBED, THE SHIELD TWISTED A QUARTER TURN TO THE RIGHT AND PUSHED HIS OPEN LEFT PALM AGAINST HIS LEFT ELBOW...
2 THEN HE PLACED HIS FOOT IN FRONT AND PRESSED HIS RIGHT ELBOW DOWNWARD WITH HIS LEFT HAND.
3 A QUICK JERK OF HIS RIGHT WRIST... AND SCRATCH ONE ATTACKER!

Bobby Bell Judo Page by Bob Powell from *Fly #5*

resembled that of Bobby Bell, a young teenager who taught basic judo moves in one-and-two-page instructional features in the earlier issues of *The Fly* that I had read.

Bell was captain of the Young Shields of America Club and he wore costumes that either matched, or closely resembled, those of his hero. (Frankly, I always found Jiu Jitsu and judo instructional pages like these to be rather intimidating—I wasn't interested in learning how to fight, but by not attempting to learn these basic judo moves, I somehow felt I was not doing something I was *supposed* to do.) The title of the story in which the Shield guest-starred was "The Monster Gang," in which he joins forces with the Fly to capture a band of crooks that is committing robberies dressed up as well-known cinematic monsters: Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, the Mummy, the Werewolf, etc. His contributions to the story, however, were minimal.

The Shield guest-starred again in the feature story in *Adventures of the Fly #9*. In the introductory caption to an adventure entitled "The Wizard of Nightmares," it is stated that the Shield's alter-ego is U. S. Army private Lancelot Strong. It is revealed in this adventure that the two heroes know each other's true identity, and the Shield demonstrates he has super-human speed and strength. Surprisingly, it is the Shield rather than the Fly

who figures out what the villain, who seemingly uses spirit demons to help him commit crimes, is actually doing and comes up with the plan to defeat him. *Fly #9* also introduced a villainess called Cat Girl. One of the most valuable pages of original art I have in my collection is the splash page from this historic story, and I am pleased to share it with you in this article.

FLY-9-P24
THE FLY
FOOL! YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE TRUSTED ME! NOW YOU WILL NEVER LEAVE THIS CAVE ALIVE!
ONE NIGHT, AT THE CAPITAL CITY ZOO, AS THE ZOO-KEEPER MAKES HIS ROUNDS!
CAT EYES! (GASP!) ONE OF THE BIG CATS MUST'VE BROKEN LOOSE!
BUT AN INSTANT LATER,,
COULD YOU HELP ME, PLEASE! I SEEM TO BE LOST! I WAS TAKING A SHORT CUT ACROSS THE PARK AND,,,
W-WHY,, I-IT'S A GIRL! IN A MASQUERADE COSTUME! MISS, YOU HAD ME WORRIED FOR A SECOND!
I THOUGHT ONE OF MY CATS HAD ESCAPED. I'D NEVER DREAM THAT A PRETTY GIRL, DRESSED IN A COSTUME, WOULD BE WALKING AROUND,,
©ONE DAY, THE STRANGEST AND MOST POWERFUL ENEMY THE FLY HAS YET BATTLED TURNS OUT TO BE A BEAUTIFUL GIRL, WHOSE IDENTITY IS STEEPED IN FRIGHTENING MYSTERY! LEARN HER MYSTERIOUS SECRET AS,,,
The Fly meets the Cat Girl
The FLY #9
Page 24
Splash page by John Giunta from Fly # 9 [from my personal collection]

The Black Hood guest-starred a second time in *Fly #10* and was featured on the cover. Unfortunately, in the story entitled "The World of the Giant Gorillas," the Hood, having no special powers, contributed very little to the action, standing by while the Fly did all the work. After this issue, neither the Shield nor the Black Hood would be featured again in any story until *Fly-Man #31*, although the Hood did "teach" karate on six instructional pages appearing in *Fly #s 26–28* and *Jaguar #s 12–14*.

6X9
JAGUAR #12 MAY
Pg. 25
The [redacted] TEACHES
I USE KARATE..THE DEFENSE OF THE OPEN HAND FOUNDED IN ANCIENT CHINA OVER 1400 YEARS AGO BY A HINDU PRIEST NAMED DARUMA!
HI, FRIENDS/ AS YOU KNOW I'M THE BLACK HOOD/ I FIGHT EVIL AND INJUSTICE. BUT I HAVE NO SUPER-HUMAN POWERS... ONLY THE POWERS OF MY MIND AND BODY!
HOW THEN CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AGAINST BIGGER MORE POWERFUL ENEMIES WHO MAY EVEN OUT-NUMBER ME IN A FIGHT? IT'S SIMPLE!
DARUMA EMIGRATED TO CHINA AT A TIME WHEN THE PEOPLE WERE KEPT DISARMED AND DEFENSELESS AGAINST BANDITS WHO RAIDED AND LOOTED THEIR VILLAGES!
ONE DAY HE GATHERED A GROUP OF BUDDIST MUNKS AND DEMONSTRATED HIS SYSTEM OF DEFENSE FOR UNARMED PEOPLE.
IT'S WRONG TO KILL/ BUT IT'S NOT WRONG TO DEFEND ONESELF!
THUS, INSTEAD OF KNIVES YOUR PEOPLE WILL USE THEIR FINGERS LIKE DAGGERS, FISTS LIKE CLUBS, THEIR ARMS LIKE SPEARS AND THEIR HANDS LIKE SWORDS! WATCH CAREFULLY AS I INHALE DEEPLY RAISE MY ARM, ELBOW POINTED OUT A FEW INCHES FROM MY CHEST/ MY HAND IS READY TO DESCEND AT LIGHTNING SPEED....
I BRING DOWN MY HAND WITH ALL FORCE AND LO!.. THIS THICK STONE IS CRACKED IN HALF!
NEAT TRICK, EH? READ THE FLY AND THE JAGUAR WHERE I WILL TEACH THE SECRETS OF... KARATE SELF-DEFENSE!
49

"Black Hood Teaches Karate" by John Rosenberger [from my personal collection]

Beginning with *Adventures of the Fly #11*, a new artist took over the series. Many years later, I learned the artist's name—John Rosenberger. Even though I liked the art on the earlier issues of *The Fly*, the new look was very clean and polished and it appealed to me a great deal.

PRESENTLY, AS THE SPIDER'S BOAST COMES TRUE...
IT'S NO USE! I COULD DIG UP HALF THE CITY AND STILL NOT FIND THE SPIDER! IF HE HAS MY POWERS, HE COULD BE ANYWHERE!
THAT NIGHT IN CAPITAL CITY...
WHY DIDN'T I STEAL THE FLY'S POWERS SOONER? HE CAN NEVER CAPTURE ME! I CAN DO ANYTHING HE CAN--LIKE CLIMB THE WALLS OF THIS SKYSCRAPER...
... AND STAGE A JEWEL ROBBERY AT THIS MILLIONAIRE'S PENTHOUSE PARTY!
YES, FOLKS! I'M AN UNINVITED GUEST! HAND OVER YOUR VALUABLES AND NOBODY WILL BE HURT!
I-IT'S THE SPIDER!
SHORTLY, AS THE FLY SPOTS THE SPIDER MACHINE...
HE INTENDS TO RAM MY MACHINE! OKAY...LIKE A GIANT CATERPILLAR, I'LL SPIN A STEEL-LIKE CACOON AROUND IT!
INSTANTS AFTER...
OHHH!
THAT'S GIVING THE FLY A TASTE OF HIS OWN MEDICINE!... MY POWERS EQUAL HIS! THE BEST HE CAN ACHIEVE IS A STALEMATE!
WHAM!
CONTINUED
The FLY #15
Page 6

Rosenberger art from *Fly #15* [from my personal collection]

Fly #13 introduced the character of Kim Brand, Hollywood starlet. In the following issue, Brand would be granted the same powers as the Fly and from the same source: Turan, emissary from the Fly People, a world that exists on a dimensional plane outside our galaxy. From this issue forward, the Fly and Fly-Girl would battle villains both side-by-side and individually.

The same month that Fly-Girl debuted, *Adventures of the Jaguar #1* hit the stands. In "The Menace of the Inca Serpent", zoologist Ralph Hardy, while on an archaeological expedition to the Peruvian jungles, discovers a magical jaguar belt that transforms him into the Jaguar, Master of the Animal Kingdom. Just as the Fly could mimic characteristics of various insects, The Jaguar had the tough hide of a rhinoceros, the speed of a cheetah, the strength of an elephant, etc. In order to fly, however, The Jaguar had to rely upon two small jet packs conveniently attached to the belt.

JAGUAR #1 P1
27
The JAGUAR
HMM! THESE EXPLORERS DON'T KNOW I'M THE JAGUAR, AND THAT I'M ABOUT TO USE MY AMAZING ANIMAL POWERS AGAINST THIS MONSTER!
LOOK! A MAN-- FLYING RIGHT INTO THE SERPENT'S JAWS! HE'LL BE KILLED!
IT'S A BRAVE MAN WHO CAN STICK HIS HEAD INTO A LION'S MOUTH! BUT IT TAKES MORE THAN BRAVERY WHEN THE MOST AMAZING MAN IN HISTORY, THE JAGUAR, STEPS INTO THE FANGED MOUTH OF A PERUVIAN MONSTER TO DEFY THE...
MENACE OF THE INCA SERPENT!
ONE DAY, WHILE FAMED ZOOLOGIST, RALPH HARDY, ACCOMPANIES AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION IN THE PERUVIAN JUNGLES...
LOOK, RALPH! THAT JAGUAR FLOATING ON A LOG IS FALLING INTO THE WATER!
HE MUST'VE TAKEN REFUGE ON THAT LOG AND GOTTEN TRAPPED WHEN IT FLOATED DOWNSTREAM!
GR-ROWRR!
I'LL RESCUE HIM!
INSTANTS LATER...
YOU WANT TO S-SAVE HIM? BUT, RALPH, A JAGUAR IS THE MOST SAVAGE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE!
YES, BUT I CAN'T BEAR TO SEE ANY ANIMAL DIE WHEN I CAN PREVENT IT!
The Jaguar #1
Pay
1

Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

Introductory splash page from ADVENTURES OF THE JAGUAR # 1, drawn by Rosenberger

It became common practice for house ads in *The Fly* to promote the lastest issue of *The Jaguar* and vice versa. Shortly thereafter, Fly, Fly-Girl, and Jaguar stories started running in *Pep #s 150-160* and *Laugh #s 127-143*. John Giunta did Jaguar stories in *Laugh #s 127, 130, 131, 133, 140, 141,* and *142* and *Pep #s 152 and 159*; Fly stories in *Laugh #s 128, 129, 132, 134, 138, and 139* and Pep *#s 151 and 154*; and Fly-Girl stories in *Laugh #s 136 and 143* and *Pep #s 153, 155, 156, and 158*. John Rosenberger did Jaguar stories in *Laugh # 135* and *Pep #s 150 and 157*; and Fly stories in *Laugh # 137* and *Pep # 160*.

In time, letters pages were added to both The Fly and The Jaguar: "On the Fly" and "The Jaguar's Lair." In thumbing through my collection in preparing for this article, I discovered a fan letter in The Fly # 22 written by Marv Wolfman! He was complimentary of the art and

stories, but he thought it was a detriment to give the Fly the power to mimic insects, and he especially objected to the introduction of Fly-Girl. It was interesting to read those comments, because those special powers and the addition of the winged heroine were things that I liked a great deal. *Fly #23* included a letter from Buddy Saunders, who now runs My Comic Shop. He questioned whether the company planned to bring back its "old" heroes—the Hood, the Hangman, and the Wizard specifically—but I had no idea who those last two characters were. In *Jaguar #8*, the editor responded to a query and informed readers that the artist for the *Fly* and *Jaguar* comics was John Rosenberger. This same letter page had the suggestion that the Archie heroes should team up to form the Anti-Crime Squad. In actuality, until *Fly-Man #31*, the only team-up of heroes occurred in a story entitled "The Ice Giant from Pluto" in *Fly #23*. It featured the Fly, Fly-Girl, and the Jaguar together for the first and only time in one adventure.

Adventures of the Jaguar #15 was cover dated November, 1963, and it was the final issue of the series. *Adventures of the Fly #28* was cover dated October, 1963, and three months elapsed before the next issue arrived at the newsstands. Once again, the book had a completely different look to it. Rosenberger was gone, replaced by his predecessor, John Giunta. Even though Giunta was the artist when I first started reading this book, I had become too accustomed to the look Rosenberger had given the characters, so I was disappointed with the change of artists. (Looking back on this issue now, I once again appreciate Giunta's very distinctive style and I wonder how I could have been so critical of it in early 1964.)

Nine more months passed before *Adventures of the Fly #30*, the final issue with that title, hit the racks in October, 1964. Giunta was once again the artist, and the most interesting thing about the book was the introduction of the Comet. This character bore no similarity to the Golden Age hero with the same name; rather, he was a former ruler of the planet Altrox, where all inhabitants have super powers. He comes to Earth to win the affections of Fly-Girl, but she suspects that he's a phony who's up to no good. She puts him through a series of tests, but by the time she's satisfied about his intentions, he's fed up with her suspicions and returns home.

Seven more months passed before issue #31 arrived at the newsstands. Although the numbering continued from the previous issue, the title was changed to Fly-Man, and everything about the book was different, and, in my opinion, all for the worse. The artwork was bad, the story was ridiculous, and the captions and dialogue were almost unreadable. Not only had the hero's name been changed to Fly-Man, but he'd also been given the ability to grow to gigantic size, a power he acquired without explanation and which was not a logical extension of the abilities he might naturally be expected to have as master of the insect world. His long-time partner, Fly-Girl, was nowhere to be seen. The Comet looked completely different than he had just seven months previously in *Fly #30*. The Shield was no longer Lancelot Strong and he wore a different costume. The Black Hood's costume had changed, too, with red gloves, trunks, and boots replaced with blue, and with a blue cape added. He also packed a ray gun and rode a robot horse named Nightmare. For me, the entire book was a nightmare! The attraction the book had had for me for several years was all gone.

Nevertheless, the Mighty Crusaders had been formed, and there was no going back. Over time, I learned that the writer, Jerry Ess, was really Jerry Siegel, co-creator of Superman, and that the artist, Paul Are, was actually Paul Reinman. *Fly-Man #33* featured the return of Fly-Girl and had the heroes battling The Wizard and The Hangman; as far as I knew, these two were original characters, newly introduced in this issue. I didn't think much of the former, but I thought the Hangman, armed with a magic lasso, was pretty cool, and I regretted that he was a bad guy. I thought he'd make for a much better hero!

With *Fly-Man #34*, cover dated November, 1965, the book shifted from one novel-length adventure to two shorter stories, a format similar to that found in Marvel's *Tales of Suspense*, *Tales to Astonish*, and *Strange Tales*. Fly-Man had the lead story, backed up initially by *the Shield* in #s 34–37. The Web was the second feature in *Fly-Man #38*, and Steel Sterling had his first Silver Age story in #39. Two issues included origin tales: the Black Hood in #35 and the Web in #36. A house ad in *Fly-Man #34* promoted a new *Steel Stirling* comic, but that book never materialized. With *Fly-Man #35*, the Mighty Comics Group logo debuted.

The same month that *Fly-Man #34* was published, the first issue of *Mighty Crusaders* also arrived at newsstands. Back-up stories in the first three Crusader issues featured the origins of the Shield, the Comet, and Fly-Man. It was the fourth issue of *Mighty Crusaders*, however, that proved to be of historic import. "Too Many Super Heroes" was the title, and, for me, it was absolutely true—there were too many heroes, and none of them had any appeal. Even though the splash page indicated that the heroes that were to appear in this issue were MLJ ultra heroes from the Golden Age, that meant little to me. Although I was aware by this time that characters like Superman, Batman, Captain America, Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch, Captain Marvel, and a few others had been popular comic book characters in the 1940s, I had not heard anything at all about MLJ heroes. Therefore, the multitude of costumed characters that flashed across the pages of *Mighty Crusaders #4* seemed like cheap imitations. Fireball, Inferno, and Firefly were Human Torch rip-offs; the Fox, Black Jack, and the Web seemed too much like the Black Hood; Mr. Justice was clearly modeled after DC's Spectre; Captain Flag was a Captain America wanna-be; Zambini the Miracle Man and Kardak the Mystic Magician were pale imitations of Dr. Strange. The only character of even minor interest to me was Steel Sterling, mostly because of his name. Bob Phantom had a good name, too, but he didn't do anything at all throughout the story. Jaguar was a pale imitation of his former self. "Too Many Super Heroes" was truly an unforgettable story, but for all the wrong reasons. The heroes of my youth had fallen to an all-time low.

Mighty Crusaders #5 picked up where the previous issue left off, with the Fox, the Web, and Captain Flag forming the Ultra-Men, while Mr. Justice, Steel Sterling, and the Jaguar became the Terrific Three. With Mighty Crusaders #6, the creative team's real names were given on the splash page: Rick Goldwater, Jerry Siegel, Paul Reinman, and Victor Gorelick. Despite its title, *Mighty Crusaders #7*, the last issue in the series, didn't feature the Crusaders at all—instead, there was a solo story starring Steel Sterling (with art by Mike Sekowsky), another tale teaming up the Shield and the Black Hood, and a Fly-Girl origin story.

In the meantime, the Fly-Man title was changed once again, becoming *Mighty Comics Presents* with issue #40. The title change was something of a death knell for the Fly/Fly-Man—never again would he appear in a solo story during the Silver Age. Web stories filled issue #40; the Shield starred in #41; and the Black Hood had both stories in #42. Beginning with *Mighty Comics Presents #43*, each issue featured two heroes: #43 had the Shield and the Web; #44 starred the Black Hood and Steel Sterling; #45 (and #48) featured the Shield and the reformed Hangman; #46 paired Steel Sterling with the Web; #47 had The Black Hood and Mr. Justice; #49 featured Steel Sterling and the Fox; and #50, the final issue of the book, cover dated October, 1967, starred the Black Hood and the Web.

After October, 1967, the Archie/Radio Comics/Mighty Comics heroes were all gone from the scene. They wouldn't reappear in new stories until 1983. Over those sixteen years, I gradually became more informed about these costumed crimefighters.

For my first insight, I have Alan Light and his Flashback series to thank. If memory serves, I saw these black-and-white reprints of Golden Age comics advertised in *The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom*. (Oh, what fond memories I have of scouring each new issue of this paper every two weeks, looking for those hard-to-find back issues I wanted.) This was about 1972–73, and I was in college at the time, so, even though the books only cost $3.00 each, it was a bit of a challenge to scrape together the money to buy *Pep #1, Pep #17*, and *Special Comics #1*. These inexpensive reprints were my first real taste of Golden Age comics. Imagine my surprise to learn from these books that the Shield, the Hangman, Steel Sterling, Mr. Justice, the Black Hood and others were not cheap imitations of characters published by other companies, but actually had been influential characters themselves in the early days of the Golden Age of Comics. I gained a greater perspective and a whole new appreciation of them.

Somewhere along the way, I also learned the early history of the Fly. Needless to say, I was surprised to discover that the character had been created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby.

I was even more surprised to learn that the powers of the Fly had been given, not to an adult lawyer named Thomas Troy, but to a young orphan named Tommy Troy. (The shift from boyhood to manhood happened "off

I THE FLY DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR THAT NOTHING SHALL KEEP ME FROM FULFILLING MY SACRED VOW.. TO ERASE CRIME FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH!!
JOE SIMON

Joe Simon's recreation of art used on the covers of FLY # 1 and FLY # 3

screen" between the fourth and fifth issues, after Simon and Kirby had left the series. In the lead story for Fly #5, it is explained that nine years have passed since the events which took place in *Fly #4*, that the Fly has not been seen by the public over that period of time, and that the youngster Tommy Troy has gone to school to become a lawyer. The first page of the book shows Thomas Troy proudly hanging out his shingle.) I also learned that the powers originally given to the Fly were rather limited: he could fly, climb walls, see in all directions, and exercise super strength. His abilities to mimic insects and communicate and control them telepathically were added in this fifth issue. I mentioned earlier in this article that it was probably a good thing that I had not read any issues of *The Fly* prior to John Giunta's arrival. It may seem sacrilegious to many comic book fans for me to say this, but, frankly, I never really cared for Joe Simon's or Jack Kirby's artwork. I certainly have a deep respect and appreciation for their many contributions to comics, but I have just never liked the way their stories were written and drawn. I've long felt that, if I had read one of the early *Fly* comics by Simon and Kirby, I might have been turned off by it and might never have picked up a later copy. And if *that* had happened, I might never have become a comic book fan and collector!

At roughly the same time I learned these bits of information about the Fly, I also learned that Simon and Kirby had reworked the Golden Age Shield into a new version of the hero in the awkwardly-titled and short-lived comic *The Double Life of Private Strong*.

PVT STRONG-1-P1.
WHO IS THIS MAN? WHAT IS HE? WHAT IS THE INCREDIBLE SECRET THAT MAKES HIM THE MOST FEARSOME FIGHTING MACHINE EVER ENCOUNTERED IN THE BATTLE FOR JUSTICE?
MEET LANCELOT STRONG
THE MAN WITH THE DOUBLE LIFE!
SEE HIM HURL BOLTS OF LIGHTNING GENERATED IN HIS OWN BODY...
...GASP AT THE REFLEXES THAT DEFY THE DEADLIEST WEAPONS AT POINT BLANK RANGE!
WATCH HIM ADAPT TO TEMPERATURES IN WHICH NOTHING CAN STAY ALIVE!
FOLLOW HIM INTO UNDERSEA DEPTHS WHERE NO MAN CAN FOLLOW--BEGIN THE AMAZING, SPINE-TINGLING ADVENTURES OF THE SHIELD--A NEW AND DIFFERENT TYPE OF HERO WHO PACKS THE PUNCH OF A HYDROGEN BOMB!
BEGIN HIS STORY NOW--ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES!
DARKNESS CANNOT STOP HIM--NO MORE THAN IT DOES THE BAT, WHOSE UNCANNY INSTINCT IS MORE ACCURATE THAN RADAR!
PRIVATE STRONG #1 Page 1

First page from *The Double Life of Private Strong #1*

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Red Rube and More

by Rik Offenberger

Steve Ditko once said, "We all stole from each other" and nothing proves that point better than Red Rube.

Red Rube was a short-lived feature in Zip Comics that replaced the Web when interest waned. Editor Harry Shorten hired Ed Robbins to create the MLJ Superman as a comedic superhero. MLJ Comics was big on non-powered masked mystery men but short on superpowered heroes. Ed Robbins had been working on the Wizard portion of Shield Wizard Comics, and had previously worked for C.C. Beck at Fawcett Comics on Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel. He combined aspects of the Marvels with the name "Red Rube" taken from the lead character in the film "The Redemption of Red Rube" and with a figure from the Alex Ramond movie poster for Academy Award Nominated Best Picture Captain Blood, starring Errol Flynn.

Red Rube was the last Golden Age superhero created at MLJ Comics, he was the end of the first heroic era at the company that would become Archie Comics. In the Silver Age, Archie revived all their Golden Age heroes, most notably in Mighty Crusaders #4's "Too Many Heroes". Only two heroes didn't make the cut, Red Rube and Mr. Satan. While Mr. Satan may have had some trouble with the Comics Code Authority, there is no apparent reason why Red Rube wasn't included. Furthermore, neither Red Rube nor Mr. Satan were ever published again, causing them to have the distinction of being the only MLJ superheroes to fall into public domain.

THEY HUNT HIM HERE -- THEY TRAP HIM THERE -- BUT HE CONFOUNDS OUR ENEMIES EVERYWHERE! HE FOILS THEM WITH POWERS INCREDIBLY NEW! WHILE THEY SEARCH FOR ONE MAN WHO REALLY IS TWO!
I CAN'T HIT HIM! HE DODGES BULLETS LIKE HE CAN WALK BETWEEN THEM!
THE DOUBLE LIFE OF PRIVATE STRONG
THIS IS THE ERA OF ATOMIC MIRACLES, OF FAR REACHING ADVANCES THAT WILL BRING MAN TO NEW HEIGHTS OF ACHIEVEMENT... BUT IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS...THE COLD WAR STILL CONTINUES...
THESE INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE DELIVERED TO "AGENT FOUR" IN AMERICA AS YOU WISH, COMMISSAR!
THIS IS A MISSION ONLY HE CAN HANDLE. IN ADDITION TO HIS CRUELTY AND CUNNING, "AGENT FOUR" ALSO POSSESSES THE ORIENTAL QUALITY OF PATIENCE!
THEN THE AMERICANS ARE DEVELOPING SOMETHING NEW-- SOMETHING -- BIG --
SOMETHING THEY LAUGH AT, COMRADE! IT'S THE WORK OF A MAN NAMED FLEMING! BUT WE ARE NOT LAUGHING -- WE ARE QUITE INTERESTED IN THIS MAN'S EXPERIMENTS!

Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

Second page from *The Double Life of Private Strong* #1

Whatever else can be said about these Simon and Kirby *Fly* and *Private Strong* books, there were certainly a number of well-known artists working on them. In addition to Joe and Jack, there was Paul Reinman, Al Williamson, George Tuska, and Bob Powell. Perhaps you have read somewhere previously that a young Neal Adams had his first comic work published in *Adventures of the Fly #4*. It was only one panel, covering the bottom third of a page, but it was a dramatic depiction of Tommy Troy's transference into the Fly.

FLY-4 P11
MUGGSY'S MASTERPIECES!
OUR STORY OPENS IN THE SUBURBS NEAR THE HOUSE WHERE TOMMY TROY LIVES WITH OLD BEN AND ABIGAL MARCH...
GOSH, THE MARCHES HAVE BEEN SO NICE TO ME LATELY-- I CAN'T HELP WONDERING IF THEY'VE REALLY CHANGED!
TOMMY! LOOK!
C'MON, MUGGSY-- YOU AND THOSE PICTURES ARE GOIN' FOR A RIDE!
WHILE DOLLYS ATTENTION IS DIVERTED, TOMMY RUSHES OUT OF SIGHT. HE RUBS HIS MAGIC RING AND IS TRANSFORMED INTO THE FLY!
TICKLE
THE FLY #4 Page 11

Neal Adam's first published art—bottom panel—from ADVENTURES OF THE FLY # 4

Adams told me at the 2019 Heroes Con in Charlotte that this panel had been taken from some sample pages he had submitted to the company and that he was correctly paid one-third of the going rate for a full page of art.

Once I graduated college and had a full-time job, one of the first things I tried to do was assemble a complete run of *Adventures of the Fly* and the two issues of *The Double Life of Private Strong*. It took some effort, but I was finally able to do so. In 1984, I had the pleasure of meeting Jack Kirby at a small comic show held in Greensboro, N. C., and had him sign my two copies of *Private Strong* and the first issue of *The Fly*. I also commissioned him to do a sketch of the Fly to be done at his convenience at home. A few weeks later, I received a fairly detailed rendering of the Winged Wonder about to enter through the window of a high-rise building to apprehend two sinister-looking thugs. I'm pleased to share this sketch with you now.

This drawing has not been seen by many individuals—if there are Kirby fans among you, I hope you'll enjoy seeing it.

Commissioned Jack Kirby sketch from 1985

In 1975, I was living in Charlotte, N. C. and was able to cobble together just enough money to make the five-hour drive to Atlanta to attend my first-ever comic book convention. Stan Lee was one of the guests and it was a wonderful experience to meet him in person. The Second Annual Atlanta Comic and Fantasy Fair was rather small in comparison to conventions nowadays—there was only one dealers' room and maybe sixty tables total—but, as it was my first show, it seemed enormous to me. For two days, I scoured through every box at every table, even though I only had about $80.00 total to spend on books. I can still remember many of the books I bought at the show, but the one that really stands out is *Black Hood #15* for $3.00. This book changed the entire thrust of my comic collecting.

Black Hood #15 was the start of my MLJ/Archie Golden Age collection. That specific book is still a part of my collection nearly 45 years later. To have in my possession what was at that time a 30-year-old book featuring a hero with whom I had first become acquainted at the age of ten thrilled me beyond words. I returned home determined to learn more about not only *this* character, but about all the other costumed heroes published by this company during the forties. My primary source was the latest edition of *Overstreet's Comic Book Price Guide*, supplemented by Jerry Bails' *Collector's Guide: The First Heroic Age*, Howard Keltner's Index to

Golden Age Comic Books, and Raymond Miller's brief article, "A Nostalgic Look at MLJ," printed in THE *Rocket's Blast ComiCollector #120*. From these materials I was able to compile a comprehensive list of every MLJ/Archie comic that featured a costumed hero from the company's humble beginnings with *Blue Ribbon #1* (November, 1939) through *Pep Comics #66* (March, 1948), the issue in which the Shield G-Man Club officially ended, to be replaced by the Archie Club.

I knew I could never afford to seriously collect Golden Age DC or Timely comics, and I had no particular desire to do so. But I could—*and I determined that I would*—collect as many MLJ books as possible. Whenever I bought a book through the mail or at a comic show, I circled that issue on my hand-written list of MLJ's comics in red. All these many years later, I still have that list, and—*and* I am pleased to report that *all the issues are circled!*

Although I was happy to add any MLJ comic to my collection, regardless of the stories contained therein, my primary goal was to acquire those books which featured the Black Hood: *Top-Notch* #s 9-44, *Jackpot* #s 1-9, *Black Hood* #s 9-19, and *Pep* #s 48-51, 59, and 60. I actively collected comics through 1995, and by that time I had obtained about 100 MLJ books in total, and all of the Black Hood comics listed above.

Other interests and financial considerations caused me to stop actively collecting comics in 1995, and it was not until I retired in 2013 that I started collecting once again. Thanks to eBay, Heritage Auctions, ComicLink, ComicConnect, and other outlets, it has become much easier to find needed back issues—more expensive, perhaps, but nonetheless easier. After three years of aggressively pursuing the issues I was missing—and at some detriment to my IRA account—I finally succeeded in buying a copy of *Zip #3* in December, 2017. With

PEP
PEP
TOP-NOTCH
ZIP
ZIP COMICS
ZIP
ZIP COMICS
PEP
PEP
TOP-NOTCH
PEP
PEP
PEP

that book in hand, I was at long last able to say that I had a copy of *every MLJ comic that featured a costumed hero!*

Along the way, I started collecting *Archie, Jolly Jingles, Laugh, Super Duck, Suzie*, and *Wilbur* comics, too. As I write this, I am seven issues shy of having every MLJ/Archie comic printed between 1939 and March of 1948. Because one of the books I am missing is *Archie* #1, and since I'm really not interested in spending $40,000 to get a 2.5 copy of it, it is likely that I will never complete the set, but I'm fairly confident that I'll eventually track down the other six books.

I suppose the proper place to start talking about MLJ comics is with the company's first published book, *Blue Ribbon #1*, in November, 1939. The editors proudly informed readers that they would find all original material between the book's covers, and the stories ran the gamut of genres: adventure, science-fiction, crime, western, mystery, and others. About the only thing missing was a costumed hero adventure. The lead story was Rang-A-Tang, The Wonder Dog. It's also worth noting that not all pages in this book were printed in four color—some stories were printed in red and black ink only.

It's hard to say which character was MLJ's first true super hero, as *Blue Ribbon #2* and *Top-Notch #1* were both released in December, 1939. The former featured Bob Phantom, Scourge of the Underworld, as a secondary story to Rang-A-Tang, while the latter presented both the Wizard, the Man with the Super Brain, and the Mystic as a supporting feature. Clearly, Bob Phantom was never intended as anything more than a supporting feature, and he remained such throughout his career, whereas the Wizard was *Top-Notch*'s unquestioned star, appearing on the cover and in the lead story. Somehow, though, even though the Wizard wore a mask and cape, he doesn't quite strike me as a costumed hero in his first appearance; for that reason, I give Bob Phantom the gold medal for being MLJ's first super-hero, with the Wizard taking silver. Curiously, even though Bob Phantom had extraordinary abilities—he seemed impervious to bullets and could seemingly appear and disappear at will—no origin was ever provided to explain how Walt Whitney, society-columnist-turned-vigilante, acquired these abilities. Also curious is that the name Kardak was never once mentioned in either the Mystic's first or second story. The moniker finally sees print in *Top-Notch #4*, in the character's third appearance.

Along with *Blue Ribbon #3* and *Top-Notch #2* (the latter depicting a swastika on the cover of a comic for the very first time), January, 1940 also saw the debut of *Pep #1*, with the Shield, G-Man Extraordinary, as its lead story, and the Comet as a strong back-up feature.

Irving Novick was the artist for both Bob Phantom and the Shield and I thought his work on these stories was fairly good, if somewhat constrained, especially when he adhered to an eight-panel-per-page format that was necessarily restrictive. His art certainly lacked vitality when compared to Jack Cole's exuberant style. The Shield's "origin" was given in one introductory panel on the splash page—Joe Higgins' father had been killed by foreign spies during World War I, so he decides that he will avenge his father by dedicating himself to protecting his country from evildoers, both domestic and foreign. He joins the F.B.I. and, since he considers himself to be acting as a "shield" in defense of the nation, it stands to reason that he creates a costume that symbolizes that role. The creators were a little sketchy, though, in explaining just how Higgins managed to design an outfit that gave its wearer super strength and super speed. Somewhat more understandable was that the costume was bullet proof and flame proof.

Jack Cole's Comet stood in stark contrast to Novick's heroes. Comet's origin was explained quickly over four panels—John Dickering discovers a gas that, when injected into his blood stream, makes him lighter than air. After many injections, excess gas accumulates in Dickering's eyes, causing them to throw off powerful beams that disintegrate whatever crosses their path. In order to control this devastating power, Dickering designs a special visor that prevents the beams from being released unless he wants them to be. (The Comet clearly seems to be the model for Lee and Kirby's Cyclops character in the X-Men.) Incorporating the visor into a streamlined, red-and-black outfit adorned with moons and stars, Dickering goes forth to fight crime as the Comet. These unique abilities alone would have set the hero apart from other costumed avengers, but the

Comet did something else that separated him from other super-heroes—he had no problem with putting the bad guys to death. The Comet seemed perfectly comfortable acting as judge and jury, and in the origin story alone, he kills three crooks in the space of six panels, vaporizing two with his beams and dropping the third one from the sky and letting him fall to his death. Villains died in other super-hero stories, of course, but usually it was because of something the crooks themselves did while trying to escape capture, not because of deliberate actions taken by the hero. At worst, heroes might have stood by idly while they watched the bad guys get their just comeuppance. The Comet deliberately meted out death without hesitation. (Having said this, I must also say that there were certainly occasions when other MLJ heroes dispatched murderers swiftly—check out Bob Phantom in *Top-Notch #4* for just one example.)

MLJ seemed to be on a roll, introducing three titles in as many months. The company premiered yet another new book in February, 1940 when *Zip #1* hit the newsstands, along with *Top-Notch* #3 and *Pep #2*. Noticeably missing, however, was the fourth issue of *Blue Ribbon*. Apparently, the creative staff felt that this book still needed revamping. The first change involved moving the Bob Phantom feature from *Blue Ribbon* to *Top-Notch*, giving that title, like *Pep Comics*, two super-hero features. MLJ's latest entry, *Zip Comics*, had no less than *four* costumed adventurers—Steel Sterling, the original "Man of Steel;" the Scarlet Avenger, Gang Buster; Mr. Satan; and Zambini, the Miracle Man.

There have been many bizarre ways in which comic book heroes have acquired their special powers, but Steel Sterling's origin seems way over the top—John Sterling throws himself into a vat of molten metal in hopes that something good will come of it. Sounds rather risky to me, but what do I know? John survives, dons a red outfit with gray trunks that appear to be made out of steel, complete with rivets, and goes out to fight crime as Steel Sterling. Charles Biro's flamboyant style well suited the character, and Steel became one of MLJ's most popular heroes.

The Scarlet Avenger, somewhat reminiscent of *Detective Comics'* Crimson Avenger, was illustrated by Novick, so the artist had a costumed crimefighter in three different books. The hero, Jim Kendall, uses his scientific ingenuity to design a super-fine, steel mesh cloak and a variety of other useful gadgets, such as a paralysis ray gun and a magnetic light beam. Wearing the red cloak and mask over his everyday green suit, the Scarlet Avenger ably fought an assortment of villains in the first seventeen issues of *Zip Comics*. He was rather a good character, and it's unfortunate that he's been overlooked in the years since.

Another forgotten costumed adventurer who debuted in *Zip #1* was Mr. Satan, drawn by Edd Ashe. Dudley Bradshaw was an international detective and soldier of fortune. In his guise as Mr. Satan, he wore an all-purple body suit with a yellow cape, and his adventures ran through the book's first nine issues.

Zambini, the Miracle Man, had miraculous powers indeed. He wore a "boomerang amulet" with which he could compel an evil force to return like a boomerang to the place where it started, and you can guess how that worked out for the villains Zambini encountered. He could shrink adversaries to the size of dolls and was a master of hypnosis. In comparison to many of MLJ's costumed heroes, Zambini enjoyed a very long career, with an uninterrupted series of stories lasting through *Zip #35*.

Features in *Top-Notch*, *Pep*, and *Zip* held steady for the next few months, while *Blue Ribbon #4* finally saw print in June, 1940, after a five-month hiatus. Rang-A-Tang was still the lead feature, backed up by Corporal Collins, who had debuted in the second issue, but all of the other features were new, with a variety of action/adventure characters: Loop Logan; Ty-Gor, Son of the Tiger; Doc Strong, Gypsy Johnson, Adventurer; Hercules; and the Green Falcon, a knight-on-horseback character. Replacing Bob Phantom as the book's sole costumed crimefighter was the Fox, written by Joe Blair and illustrated by Irwin Hasen. The Fox was the alter ego of Paul Patton, a staff photographer for the Daily Globe newspaper. He designs an all-black costume to assume the role of the Fox, and he also figures out how to attach a secret camera to his outfit so that, while he's in the act of battling crooks, he can take action pictures to sell to the newspaper. Something about this sounds suspiciously familiar. Once again, why do I feel that a young Stanley Leiber might have been a frequent reader of MLJ comics? (For the record, the second and third issues of *Blue Ribbon* featured

a character called the Silver Fox, but this individual was completely different from the costumed hero that debuted in the fourth issue.) Like Bob Phantom, the Fox was never more than a back-up feature, although he did actually make it onto the covers of BLUE RIBBON #s 7 and 16. The Phantom was never once given that honor in *Top-Notch*. The editorial staff seemed to feel that the war-themed Corporal Collins was the main supporting feature to Rang-A-Tang.

That said, it was also clear to the staff that super-heroes were the main attractions, and in July, 1940, MLJ launched its fifth title—*Shield-Wizard*. While the title lacked originality, it's a certainty that readers knew exactly what they were getting—a comic magazine that focused exclusively on the two leads from *Pep* and *Top-Notch*.

As early as September, 1940, there was a subtle, but very important, change that started taking place at MLJ. In Blue Ribbon #6, Richy, the Amazing Boy, was added to the Rang-A-Tang cast; The Wizard gained the assistance of Roy, the Super Boy in *Top-Notch #8*; and in January, 1941, Dusty, the Boy Detective, became the Shield's sidekick in PEP # 11. Adding three teenaged boys clearly indicated an effort on the part of the company to make their comics more relevant and appealing to its readership. It's also noteworthy that none of these three boys had any special powers or abilities. They were just average kids put into anything-but-average situations. (It is interesting to note that Richy, Roy, and Dusty all pre-dated the appearance of Bucky as Captain America's sidekick.)

The September, 1940 issue of *Top-Notch*, in addition to introducing Roy as the Wizard's sidekick, also provided the first appearance of the Firefly, drawn by Bob Wood. Harley Hudson, after years of rigorous research, study, and physical training achieves extraordinary abilities far exceeding those of even highly-trained athletes. He designs a black costume with red trunks and assumes the crimefighting identity of the Firefly, "lighting up the darkness that shrouds the underworld." Although I thought his stories were better than average, the new hero had scant opportunity to establish himself as a second lead feature because, in the very next issue of *Top-Notch*, MLJ introduced yet another new crimefighter, one who immediately established himself as the company's second most popular costumed hero: the Black Hood. MLJ seemed to have such confidence with its new "Man of Mystery" that his name completely overshadowed the actual title of the book on the cover. With his introduction, it was clear that the Black Hood was the book's new star, and the Wizard was relegated to back-up status.

At the beginning of 1941, Pep had two strong super-hero lead features, the Shield and the Comet. ZIP had Steel Sterling, the Scarlet Avenger, Mr. Satan, and Zambini. *Top-Notch* had an over-abundance of action heroes: the Black Hood, the Wizard, Bob Phantom, the Firefly, and Kardak. *Blue Ribbon*, on the other hand, had only the Fox. MLJ tried to correct this disparity by introducing Mr. Justice to the book's line-up. The "Royal Wraith" clearly seems to have been inspired by DC's Spectre, who had debuted exactly one year earlier in MORE FUN COMICS. Mr. Justice never had much appeal for me, but I did think that the art by Sam Cooper was well above average, and the Mr. Justice covers that graced *Blue Ribbon* #s 9–15 are among my favorite MLJ covers.

The same month that Mr. Justice debuted, another minor hero, Fireball, began a nine-issue run in *Pep*. Inferno, the Flame Breather, started out as an adversary of Steel Sterling in *Zip # 10*, but he reformed, put on a bright red costume, and began a brief career as a costumed hero in the pages of *Blue Ribbon #13*. His exploits, however, would last a scant seven issues.

In April, 1941, MLJ launched its sixth title. *Jackpot Comics* truly lived up to its name, with the lead features from *Blue Ribbon*, *Top-Notch*, and *Zip* all headlining in this new book. The company turned to PEP COMICS for the one additional feature needed to fill out the book. It passed over the Comet, who would seem to have been a logical choice, in favor of Sgt. Boyle. (This suggests to me that the editors already had something in mind with regard to the character of The Comet.) Although Steel Sterling, the Black Hood, Mr. Justice, and Sgt. Boyle were all featured on the covers of the first two issues, it was clear who the two main features were.

Jackpot #s 3, 4, 6, and 9 featured only the Hood and Steel Sterling on the cover. These two heroes were joined by Sgt. Boyle on *Jackpot* #s 5 and 8. Mr. Justice, alas, received no justice.

In July, 1941, MLJ made one of comics' most daring moves to date. One can speculate that, because the Comet had dealt so mercilessly with the various crooks he had encountered in his relatively short career, the creative staff at MLJ felt that he was not presenting the wholesome look they were going for. Whatever the reason, MLJ wrote its name onto the pages of comic book history when the decision was made to kill off the character of John Dickering. In the wake of the Comet's demise, however, a new hero arose. Bob Dickering, John's brother, determines to avenge his sibling's death by assuming the guise of the Hangman. Clearly, this dark avenger did not fit anyone's image of a typical comic book super hero. The character actually had no super powers at all, just a relentless determination to bring wrongdoers to justice. It was about this time that *film noir* started becoming a popular genre in the movies; with the introduction of the Hangman, we had *"comic noir!"*

Typical Bob Fujitani art from HANGMAN # 8

The artwork on Hangman's origin story was pretty weak, but soon Harry Lucey took over the series, and the stories looked a lot better. Happily, Bob Fujitani eventually replaced Lucey on the series, and he imbued the Hangman with an artistic style completely different than that of any other costumed avenger on the market. Fujitani's Hangman stories were wicked good!

In September, 1941, two new MLJ features appeared, one to much fanfare, the other rather quietly. Still trying to come up with just the right balance in *Blue Ribbon*, MLJ introduced Captain Flag to the line-up. Written by Joe Blair and illustrated by Lin Streeter, MLJ's newest star-spangled defender of America seemed destined for greatness, and *Blue Ribbon* finally boasted a line-up as good as all the other MLJ titles: Mr. Justice, Rang-A-Tang, the Fox, Corporal Collins, Inferno, and Captain Flag, with Ty-Gor and Loop Logan thrown in for good measure. For only a ten-cent investment, what kid could ask for more?

September's other new character was Wilbur, a teen humor feature that debuted in *Zip* #18. It has always been a bit of a puzzle to me that Wilbur, introduced three months before Archie, never attained the popularity of the freckle-faced boy from Riverdale. Wilbur would continue in *Zip* for the remainder of its run, but he never once appeared on its cover. Wilbur eventually got his own book, which ran from 1944 until 1959, but clearly his success paled when compared to that of Archie. Still, the introduction of this character foreshadowed the dramatic change that was about to take place over the next sixteen months at MLJ.

In November, 1941, yet one more costumed hero debuted. Just as the Shield and Dusty had introduced the Hangman to readers on the cover of *Pep #17*, Steel Sterling had the honor of introducing Black Jack on the cover of *Zip* #20. Black Jack's stories were illustrated by Al Camy, the same artist who was doing such a wonderful job on the Black Hood series. It wasn't in the cards for Black Jack to ever become a top-tier feature, but, following his introduction, he did appear alongside Steel Sterling on the covers of the next seven issues of *Zip*, before being trumped by the last serious costumed hero MLJ would introduce, the Web.

January/February 1942 clearly marks the high-water mark for MLJ's super heroes. Either in January or February of that year, the company introduced its seventh title, a quarterly book called *Special Comics*. The book would become *Hangman Comics* with the second issue. The Hangman had three stories in each issue, and the exploits of the dark avenger were backed up with the Boy Buddies feature, which teamed Roy, the Super Boy with Dusty, the Boy Detective. Unfortunately, while the art on Hangman was superb, the Boy Buddies suffered badly because of Bill Vigoda's amateurish illustration.

Blue Ribbom, as noted above, had a strong list of features, as did Top-Notch and ZIP. With the Shield and Hangman getting top billing, backed up by Sgt. Boyle and Bentley of Scotland Yard—an overlooked but entertaining mystery series—*Pep*'s line-up was pretty good, too, but MLJ decided to strengthen it by adding another new feature. Could anyone on the company staff have anticipated just what the introduction of Archie Andrews would mean for the future of the company? Since the red-headed rascal was given a spot in Jackpot Comics long before MLJ could have received any appreciable feedback from its readers, there is a sense that they must have thought they had hold of something special, but it's hard to imagine they had any idea how the character would take off. Archie's debut story isn't really all that funny, but over the course of just a few issues the strip really found its footing.

Like *Hangman*, *Jackpot Comics* was a quarterly publication, so it is unclear exactly when the fourth issue of this comic hit the stands. Presumably it came out after *Pep* #22, cover dated January, 1942, but did it arrive at the same time as *Pep* #23 or after? *Jackpot #4* features the first cover appearance of Archie, but he was never shown on that title's cover again. After his introduction, fourteen months passed before Archie finally appeared on the cover of *Pep #36*. Between *PEP* #s *22* and 36, however, Archie and the gang completely altered the direction of MLJ comics.

At the high-water mark, MLJ had seven titles on the market boasting a nice assortment of super heroes: *Blue Ribbon*, *Top-Notch*, *Pep*, *Zip*, *Shield-Wizard*, *Jackpot*, and *The Hangman*. However, *Blue Ribbon* #22, cover dated March, 1942, was the last issue for that title, and Captain Flag and the Fox were suddenly gone from the scene. Mr. Justice would have only five more appearances in the pages of *Jackpot*. That same March, *Top-Notch #25* presented the last Bob Phantom story.

That was far from the only change made to *Top-Notch*. *Top-Notch* #27 featured the last Firefly story, and the title of the book changed to *Top-Notch Laugh Comics* with the very next issue. The Black Hood still appeared on that cover, but whereas the Shield had had the honor of introducing The Hangman to *Pep*, and Steel Sterling had welcomed Black Jack to *Zip*, The Black Hood was given the embarrassing task of introducing Pokey Oakey, a poor man's Little Abner. A blurb at the bottom of the cover proclaimed: We Dared To Do It! A Joke Book That's Really Funny! The new title reflected the new features contained within the book. In addition to Pokey Oakey, new features included Suzie, a sexy, well-meaning, but hare-brained blonde; Snoop McGook; Senor Siesta; and The 3 Monkeyteers. Chagrined at the company he was now forced to keep,

Kardak lingered through *Top-Notch Laugh #29* before using his powers to disappear. Taking his place were the likes of Gloomy Gus and Dotty and Ditto. The Black Hood put on a brave face and soldiered through to *Top-Notch* #44 before retreating to the safety of his own book.

Bob Montana cover from TOP-NOTCH LAUGH # 31

Almost inexplicably, just as MLJ was rapidly changing its focus from costumed hero adventures to light-hearted, humorous stories, the company introduced its last great crimefighter. The Web debuted in ZIP #27, welcomed to the book by Steel Sterling and Black Jack on a beautifully done cover drawn by Irving Novick. John Cassone handled the art chores on the first story, in which The Web confronts the Black Dragon of Death, an oriental spy with ideas of blowing up troop ships headed for Australia. In this introductory story, we learn that the Web's true identity is that of John Raymond, a professor of criminology. Readers aren't the only ones who learn his secret identity, however, as Rose Wayne, a student in his class, discovers a small piece of his costume in her car after giving the professor a ride home. She puts two and two together and comes up with—the Web! In *Zip #28*, since Rose has already figured out that John Raymond and the Web are one and the same, the professor tells his student—and, in so doing, the readers—why he became a crimefighter. His brother Tom was a crook, so, to balance the scales of justice, John felt obliged to fight on the side of law and order. He chose the symbolic identity of the Web, believing that criminals are eventually trapped in webs of their own making.

But who was Ed Robbins?

Robbins attended the Pratt Institute, a private university in Brooklyn, New York, The Corcoran School of the Arts and Design at George Washington University, in Washington, DC. and the Art Students League of New York. While attending the University at age 20 Robbins started in comics by sending samples to Lloyd Jacquet at Funnies Inc. in 1939 and landing a job. Three years later, in 1942 he was hired for $50 a week by C.C. Beck to work in the Fawcett art department including working on Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel as the layout artist. This was a non-exclusive arrangement and allowed Robbins to freelance for MLJ Comics on the Wizard section of Shield Wizard Comics. Even when Robbins was drafted and served in the armed forces he continued to freelance for Fawcett while in the service. Upon discharge, he went to work for Timely Comics and worked on the All-Winners Comic among other titles. Robbins would continue to freelance for nearly all the big comic publishers from the 1940s to the 1970s. He worked for Archie Comics, Atlas, Centaur, DC Comics, Gold Key, Marvel, MLJ Comics, Stanmore Publications, Timely, and Warren. Robbins also worked on the syndicated newspaper strip Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer from the Phoenix Features Syndicate. Robbins left comics and managed a Real Estate Firm later in life.

Red Rube has an odd look by today's standards, but the Golden Age is filled with shirtless comic characters, the most notable being Timely Comics Namor and DC Comics, Hawkman, Centaur Comics Amazing Man, MLJ Comics already had the shirtless Doc Savage.

This and subsequent Web stories were illustrated by Irving Novick, who by this time was also drawing Steel Sterling. And the Black Hood. And the Hangman. And, of course, the Shield! Novick's style had changed considerably from his earliest work. Characters and panel layouts looked a lot like those drawn by Kirby.

THE GASOLINE ADDS IMPETUS TO THE FLAMES...
THE FIRE IS GETTING WORSE!
AAAARGH! I'M BEING BURNED ALIVE!
THE FIRE SPREADS RAPIDLY
HAND ME THAT EXTINGUISHER, CAPTAIN...I'D LIKE TO TRY A HAND AT FIRE FIGHTING!
GO AHEAD! WE CAN'T SEEM TO DO ANYTHING TO CHECK THE FLAMES!
JUST THEN A FAMILIAR FIGURE ZIPS ONTO THE SCENE OF THE FIRE...
STEEL STERLING!
AS SOON AS STERLING APPLIES THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER, HE IS ALMOST ENGULFED BY A
THERE'S SOMETHING MIGHTY QUEER ABOUT THIS!
IT'S NO WONDER! SOMEONE REMOVED THE CHEMICALS AND FILLED THESE WITH GASOLINE!
SAND IS THE ONLY THING TO QUENCH THIS FIRE WITH! IS THERE ANY IN THE BUILDING!
NO! BUT THERE ARE BINS OF SAND NEAR AN EXCAVATION RIGHT OUTSIDE!

Representative Irv Novick page from ZIP # 31 [from my personal collection]

The month after the Web made his first appearance in ZIP, another dramatic change took place in a two-part Shield story in *Pep* #s 29 and 30. In part one, the Shield loses his super powers, which he had gained by covering his body with a special lotion he had concocted and then exposing himself to rays from a machine he had designed. To the hero's surprise, the effects of this special treatment, received years earlier, suddenly wore off. He tries, but fails, to duplicate the treatment in part two of the story. Dusty admits that he is almost glad, because now he and the Shield can fight as equals. But dialogue in the story suggested that the important thing was not that Joe Higgins had extraordinary powers, but that, even without any special abilities, he was a patriotic American determined to fight tyranny, crime, and injustice whenever and wherever it was found.

I seem to remember reading, somewhere along the way, that Harry Shorten was a former pro football player. I also remember reading an opinion someone offered in which the suggestion was made that Shorten believed that the young readers of MLJ books would be better served if they read stories about heroes who were just ordinary men who took it upon themselves to stand up for truth, justice, and the American way. No young boy or girl could expect to jump into a vat of molten metal and come out as Steel Sterling. No one was going to die and come back to Earth as an avenging Mr. Justice. No one was going to inhale gas and suddenly be able to shoot disintegrating rays from his eyes, as did the late Comet. No one was going to breathe fire like Inferno or teleport from place to place like Bob Phantom. But boys and girls *could* study hard, become physically fit, look out for others, and stand up for what was right. Under his editorship, Shorten gave these young readers role models that they could actually grow up to be like. While the majority of MLJ's early adventurers did indeed have super powers, the later heroes were "regular" guys who worked hard to become the best that

they could be. Think about the costumed adventurers who came along as MLJ was developing the line-ups for its four original titles— the Fox, the Firefly, the Black Hood, the Hangman, Captain Flag, Black Jack, the Web—and not a single super power among them! And now the Shield, too, was just another guy!

The idea that the common man had the power within himself to do great things was underscored in the debut story of Captain Commando in *Pep #30*. Even though this was a rather straight-forward war-themed strip, since the good captain wore a colorful outfit, I've always considered him to be one of MLJ's costumed heroes. But, while Captain Commando wore the fancy duds, equally important to the story were the Boy Soldiers, four lads from different countries—America, England, France, and Norway—who fought alongside their hero—typical boys doing atypical things. The first three Captain Commando and the Boy Soldiers stories were drawn by Alex Blum, and he did a terrific job. Eventually, the stories would be illustrated by—who else?—Irv Novick. Captain Commando's last adventure was in *Pep #52*, cover dated March, 1945.

By that time, almost all of MLJ's costumed heroes had finished their runs. Black Jack folded his cards in *Zip #35*, the same issue that introduced Ginger, a female version of Archie. The Web bid adieu in *Zip #38*. Sadly, his replacement in the following issue was Red Rube. Since, as a youngster, I was told by my parents, "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all," I'll move on without comment.

With *Pep #41*, Archie appeared on the cover for only the second time, and he appeared on every cover of the book from that point forward. His own book had already been on the market for six months. Jackpot's run ended after nine issues; *Jolly Jingles* #10 hit the newsstands in July, 1943, introducing the character Super Duck. *Shield-Wizard* ended a thirteen-issue run in April, 1944. In June of that year, Steel Sterling made his last appearance in *Zip* #47. That same month, *Top-Notch Laugh #45* hits the racks without a Black Hood story inside. Suzie had taken over as lead character. The comic's title was changed to *Laugh Comics* for issue #s 46-48 before being changed again, this time to *Suzie*, with issue #49. About this same time, Wilbur was given his own book. In *Wilber #5*, Katy Keene, the Fashion Queen, makes her debut.

Only two costumed heroes remained. Although booted out of *Top-Notch*, the Black Hood continued in his own quarterly magazine through issue # 19 in the summer of 1946. In this last issue, the Hood's true identity of Kip Burland is revealed to the public. After that, he had two stories in *Pep* #s 59 and 60, in which he appeared in regular street dress as Kip Burland, not his famous alter-ego, before leaving the scene.

That left only the Shield, who carried on through *Pep #64*. Or *Pep #65*, depending upon how you want to count this last story, which is actually a truncated reprint of the Shield story from *Pep #57*. Or *Pep #66*, which does not have a Shield story in it at all, but does have Joe Higgins explaining to his loyal fans, on the inside front cover, that new assignments he has been given take up so much of his time that he is no longer able to provide the publishers of the magazine with details of his adventures. As he also has no time to participate in the Shield G-Man Club, he dutifully entrusts it to Archie Andrews, announcing that all the readers that had joined his club were automatically enrolled as members of the new Archie Club.

And with *that*, MLJ's Golden Age of costumed heroes had ended.

Fortunately, fans of these books still keep these heroes alive some 75 years later. They still entertain us and capture our imagination. I thought a good way to wrap up this article would be to share some miscellaneous thoughts I have about the various characters and to include some lists of favorites. Lists like the ones that follow can often result in some lively conversations.

RECYLCED COVERS

Pep #32 features one of the best covers in the series; the editors must have liked it, too, because they essentially used it again, with the modifications needed, for the cover of *Shield-Wizard #13*.

The cover idea for *Black Hood #9* was used again some fifteen years later for *Adventures of the Fly #3*.

Ajax/Farrell swiped the cover from *Pep #9* to use on *Black Cobra #6* in 1955.

TRANSPORTATION

Has anyone ever noticed that many of the MLJ heroes got from place to place simply by running there? With the exception of heroes like Mr. Justice, the Comet, and Bob Phantom, most other adventurers raced from place to place on foot. The star of *Zip Comics*, Steel Sterling, *zipped* from scene to scene.

NARRATIVE FLOW

Especially in the early books, I was often confused by the narrative captions which appeared at the bottom of the panels. They were obviously intended to be read *before* the reader looked at the panel art and read the dialogue, but that didn't seem natural to me—I always found myself looking at the art and reading the dialogue first.

JACKPOT FEATURES

When coming up with the line-up for this all-star magazine, Steel Sterling, the Black Hood, and Mr. Justice were all obvious choices. They were, after all, the lead features in their respective magazines. I have always questioned the inclusion of Sgt. Boyle, however. He never seemed the right fit. To me, the Scarlet Avenger, the Fox, or the Firefly would have been a better choice. After *Blue Ribbon* ended its run, continuing to have Mr. Justice in *Jackpot* didn't make much sense to me, either. If a former *Blue Ribbon* character was going to be included, I think Captain Flag would have been a better choice. Personally, I would have tapped Black Jack, newly-introduced in *Zip*, as Mr. Justice's replacement.

For me, the ideal line-up for *Jackpot* #s 5-9 would have been Steel Sterling, the Black Hood, Archie, Captain Flag, and Black Jack.

COVERS

Initially, MLJ featured the lead character on the cover. In early issues, Steel Sterling, the Shield, and the Wizard were the only heroes to appear on the covers of their respective magazines. Once strong back-up features were introduced to *Zip*, *Pep*, and *Top-Notch*, the MLJ covers adhered to a simple formula: two heroes would be featured on the covers, in scenes that had no bore no connection to the stories contained within the books. *Zip* featured Steel Sterling and Black Jack, the latter being replaced by the Web following his arrival. Pepo had the Shield and the Hangman. *Top-Notch* had the Black Hood and the Wizard. *Blue Ribbon* was the exception. Rang-A-Tang was cover-featured on the first two covers, then again on #s 6 and 8 in the company of Richy, the Amazing Boy. Richy appeared without Rang-A-Tang on #7, coming to the rescue of the Fox. *Blue Ribbon* #s 3-5 featured only Corporal Collins. Issue #s 9-15 had Mr. Justice in solo action. *Blue Ribbon* #16 had all the book's characters on the cover, with Mr. Justice "introducing" Captain Flag in his crystal ball. The latter appeared with Mr. Justice on the cover of issue #s 17 and 18, before Captain Flag had the cover to himself for issue #s 19, 21, and 22. Oddly, Corporal Collins shows up with Captain Flag on the cover of *Blue Ribbon* #20.

The Shield was on the cover of *Pep Comics* for all of the first fifty issues with one exception: in a very symbolic cover, the Hangman appears alone to face Captain Swastika on the cover of *Pep* #28.

WHO'S COUNTING?

Clearly, the Shield holds the record for appearing in the highest number of MLJ books—65 appearances in *Pep*, plus 13 in *Shield-Wizard* gives him a total of 78 books. The Black Hood comes in second, with 36 appearances in *Top-Notch*, plus 9 in *Jackpot*, 11 in *Black Hood*, and 6 in *Pep*, for a total of 62. Steel Sterling

claims the third spot with 56 appearances, 47 in *Zip* and 9 in *Jackpot*. The Hangman and the Wizard tie for fourth spot, each with 40: The Hangman appeared 31 times in *Pep*, 8 in *Hangman*, and 1 in *Black Hood*, while the Wizard had 27 appearances in *Top-Notch* and 13 in *Shield-Wizard*. As noted above, Zambini surprisingly occupies the sixth spot with 35 appearances, all in *Zip*.

Some of my personal favorites had relatively short careers. Bob Phantom did the best with 25 appearances; Tte Fox, the Firefly, and the Scarlet Avenger each had 17; Black Jack, 16; and the Web, 12.

THE PULPS AND RADIO

Although The Shield was unquestionably MLJ's Star of Stars, The Black Hood distinguished himself by appearing not only in comics, but in the pulps and on radio as well. To be fair, The Black Hood radio program aired only briefly, and the Man of Mystery made only three appearances in the pulps, but this still set him apart from all the other MLJ heroes.

Black Hood illustration from second, and final, issue of HOODED DETECTIVE

Black Hood Detective [unnumbered] was dated September, 1941. The Table of Contents page boasted "A Complete Black Hood Novel" entitled "Death's Five Faces" by G. T. Fleming-Roberts. *Hooded Detective* was cover-dated November, 1941, with the same author penning a tale called "The Corpse Came C.O.D." The January, 1942 issue of *Hooded Detective* had the Man of Mystery starring in a tale called "The Whispering Eye," also by Fleming-Roberts. "Hunted by the police . . . framed for robbery and murder by the Eye, master fiend and vicious ruler of the underworld . . . loathed by Barbara Sutton the girl who loves him . . . the Black Hood had to face the blazing purgatory of this murder master's guns to win back Barbara's love and clear himself of the framed charges."

MY GREATEST SINGLE DAY OF COMIC-COLLECTING

In September, 1991, I attended a comic convention in Orlando, Florida. First, I met Dick Ayers and had him sign an original page of art from *Avengers* #9 which Don Heck had drawn and Ayers had inked. I also met Mark Wheatley, who was the writer for Impact's new *Black Hood* comic, and he and I exchanged ideas about the character. I also purchased a copy of *Black Hood Detective* pulp magazine. Best of all, I came across a copy of *Top-Notch Laugh Comics* #32, which was *the very last book I needed to complete my run of all the Hood appearances.* How unlikely was it that I would complete a trifecta like that?

THE MYSTERY OF PEP #65

By an unbelievable coincidence, I happened to purchase *Pep* #s 57 and 65, via eBay, at the same time from the same dealer. Naturally, the seller sent both books in the same package. When the books arrived, I happily skimmed through *Pep* #57, examined its contents, and then took the time to read the Shield adventure, entitled "The Man Who Wouldn't Stay Dead." Imagine my surprise—and disappointment—when I picked up *Pep* #65 and found the very same Shield story inside! I can only guess as to what happened. Either a new feature that was to have appeared in *Pep* #65 wasn't ready by the deadline, or a new Shield story wasn't ready by the deadline, but, in either event, the editors were forced to scramble for a suitable "filler" and settled on the Shield story from *Pep* #57. To make it fit, the title page was cut altogether, and a title box replaced the first panel on page two of the story.

FAVORITE COVERS

Lists like these always make for lively discussions. One of the reasons MLJ books are so highly sought after by collectors is because of their colorful, action-packed, and sometimes outrageously violent covers. Here are my top twenty favorites, listed alphabetically:

Black Hood #15—Everett Raymond Kinstler
Blue Ribbon #9—Sam Cooper
Blue Ribbon #13—Sam Cooper
Blue Ribbon #16—Sam Cooper
Blue Ribbon #21—Lin Streeter
Hangman #3—Harry Lucey
Hangman #4—Harry Lucey
Jackpot #7—Irving Novick
Pep #9—Irving Novick
Pep #26—Irving Novick
Pep #30—Bob Montana
Pep #32—Bob Montana
Top-Notch #1—Edd Ashe
Top-Notch #24—Al Camy
Zip #8—Charles Biro
Zip #13—Charles Biro
Zip #19—Irving Novick
Zip #20—Irving Novick
Zip #27—Bob Montana
Zip #30—Bob Montana

FAVORITE HEROES

My top ten MLJ heroes, listed in order of preference:

The Black Hood, the Hangman, the Shield, Black Jack, Bob Phantom, the Web, the Firefly, Captain Commando, the Fox, and Steel Sterling

FAVORITE ARTISTS

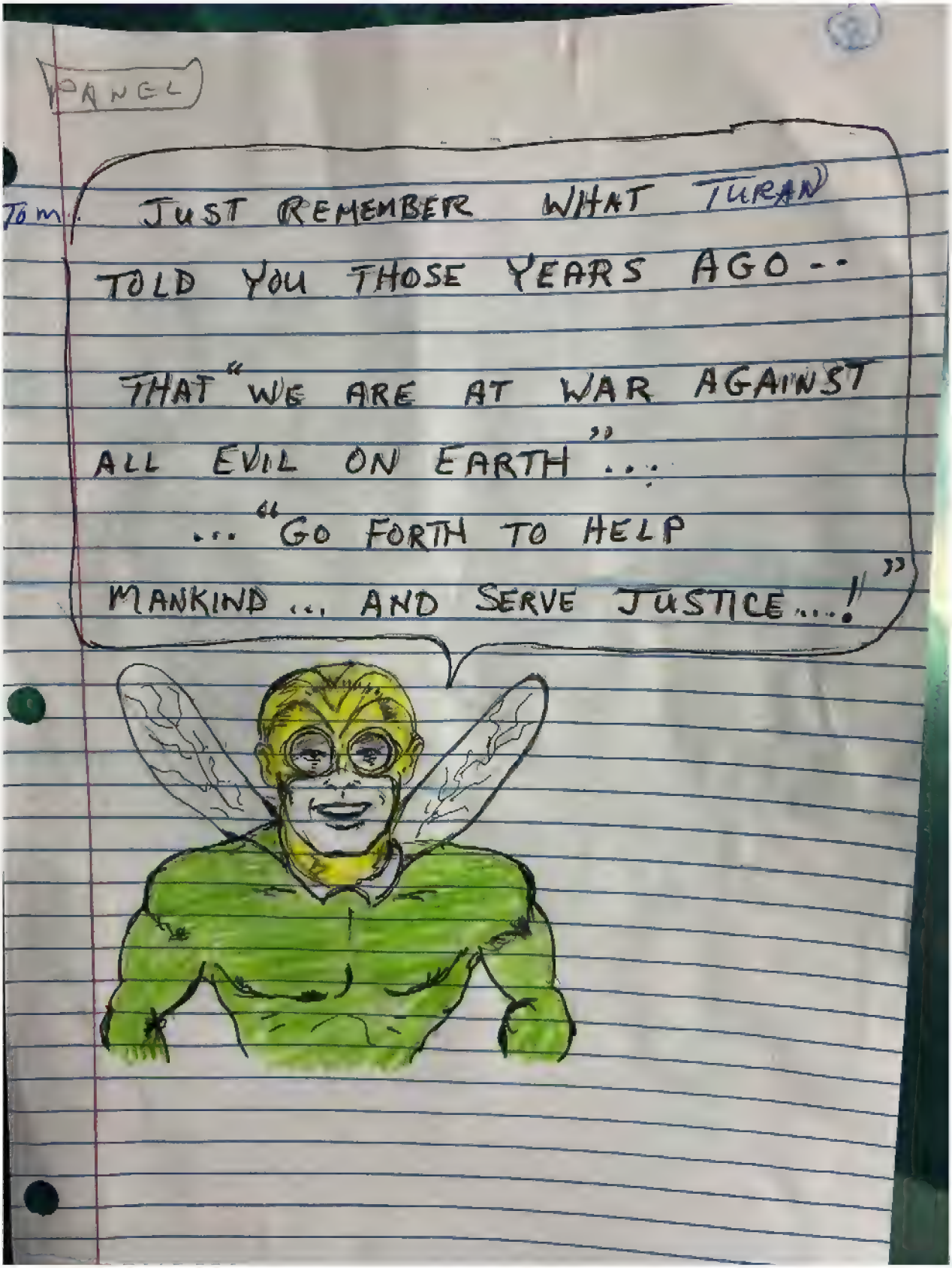
This list is a bit more subjective than the others, because I would naturally gravitate toward those artists associated with my favorite heroes; conversely, the heroes likely became favorites because I liked the way they were drawn. The two go arm-in-arm. That said, here are my ten favorite MLJ artists, in order:

Warren King, Al Camy, Bob Fujitani, Bob Montana, Lin Streeter, Irving Novick, Sam Cooper, Harry Lucey, and Jack Cole

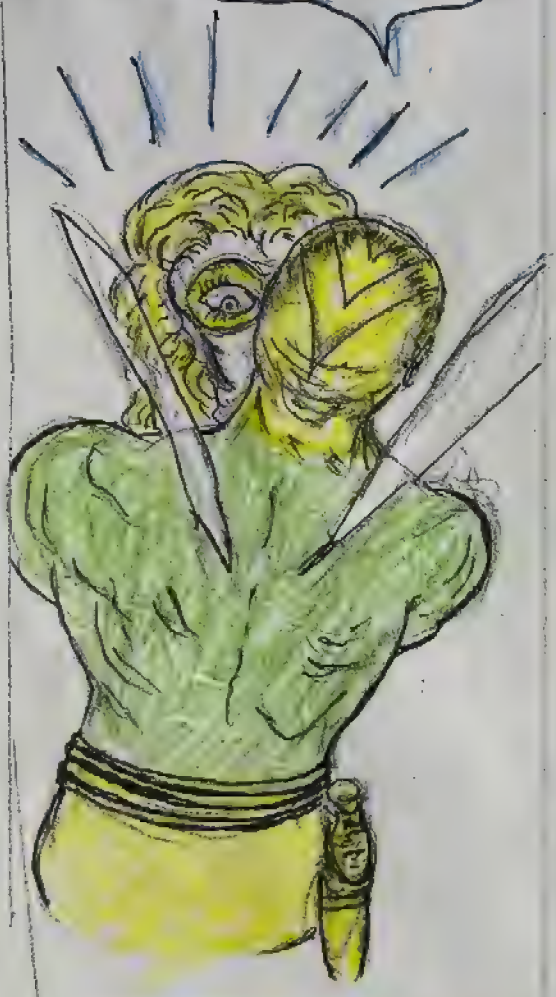
Gary McCullough—Agent 89

Last Days of the Fly!!, Part 2

by Daniel St. John


PANEL
Tom: JUST REMEMBER WHAT TURAN TOLD YOU THOSE YEARS AGO --
THAT "WE ARE AT WAR AGAINST ALL EVIL ON EARTH"...
..."GO FORTH TO HELP MANKIND ... AND SERVE JUSTICE...!"

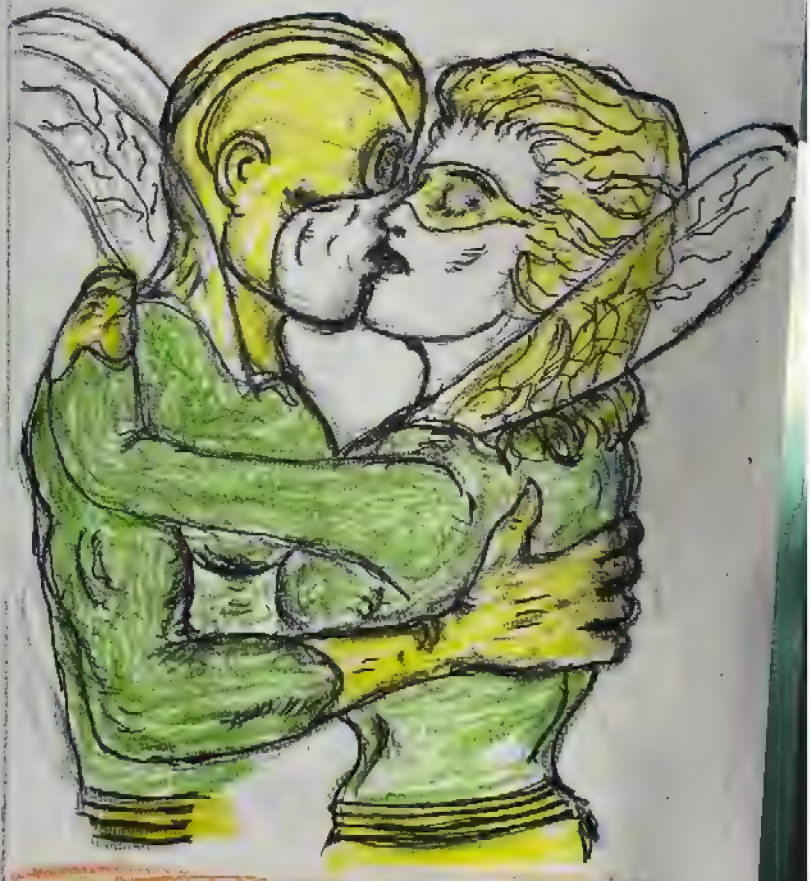
AND... REMEMBER THIS...



... AND HE KISSED ME!!

I ADMIT I WAS A BIT SHOCKED... AND I WONDERED WHAT TURAN WOULD THINK OF IT... BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS WONDERFUL!!

I FINALLY LET GO --- AND LET THE FEELINGS RUSH IN!! THERE MUST BE SOME REAL MAGIC IN THOSE RINGS--

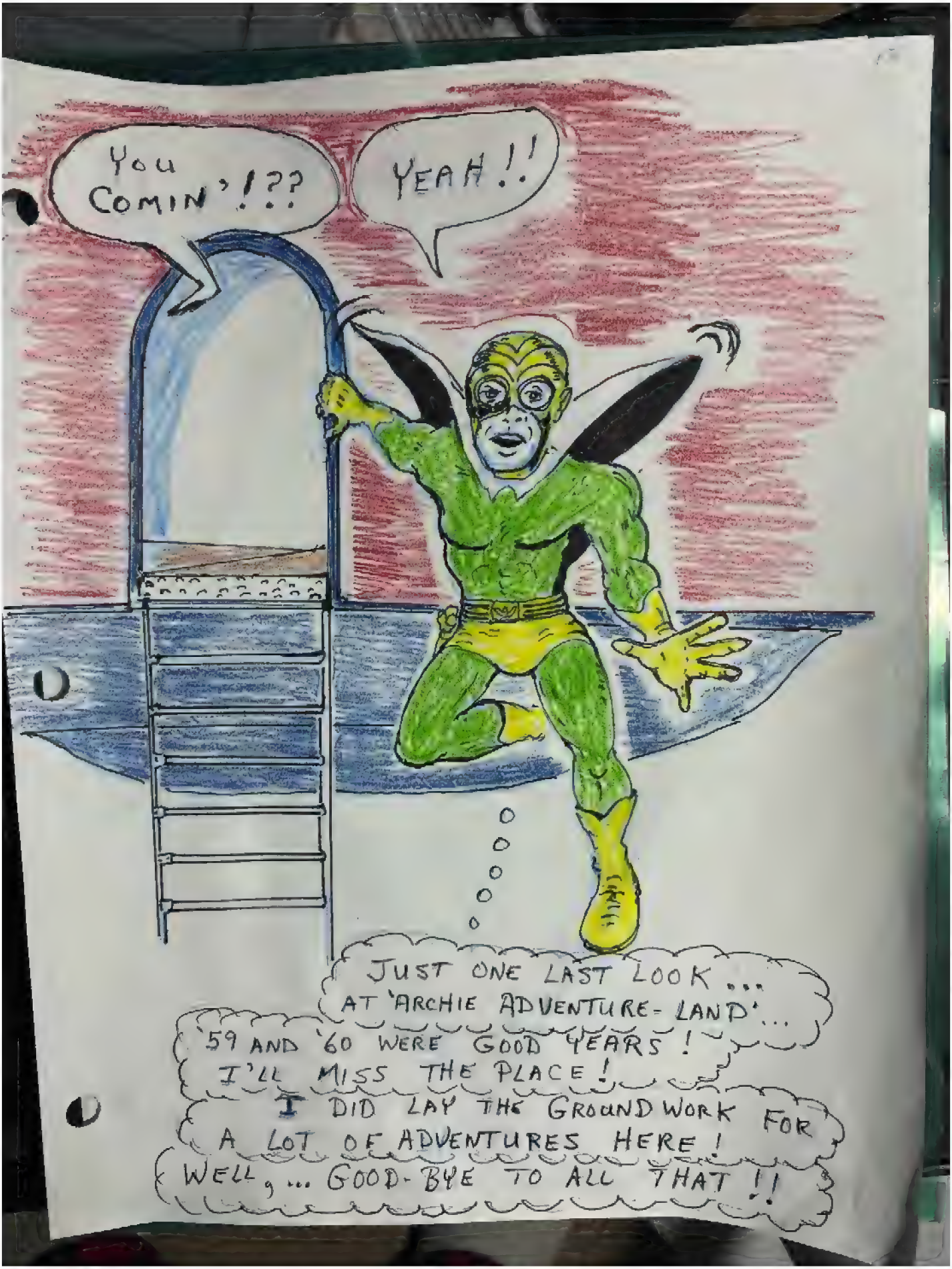


.. BECAUSE I FELT BEYOND AWESOME!! ... SO INDESCRIBABLE!!

... AND THEN ...

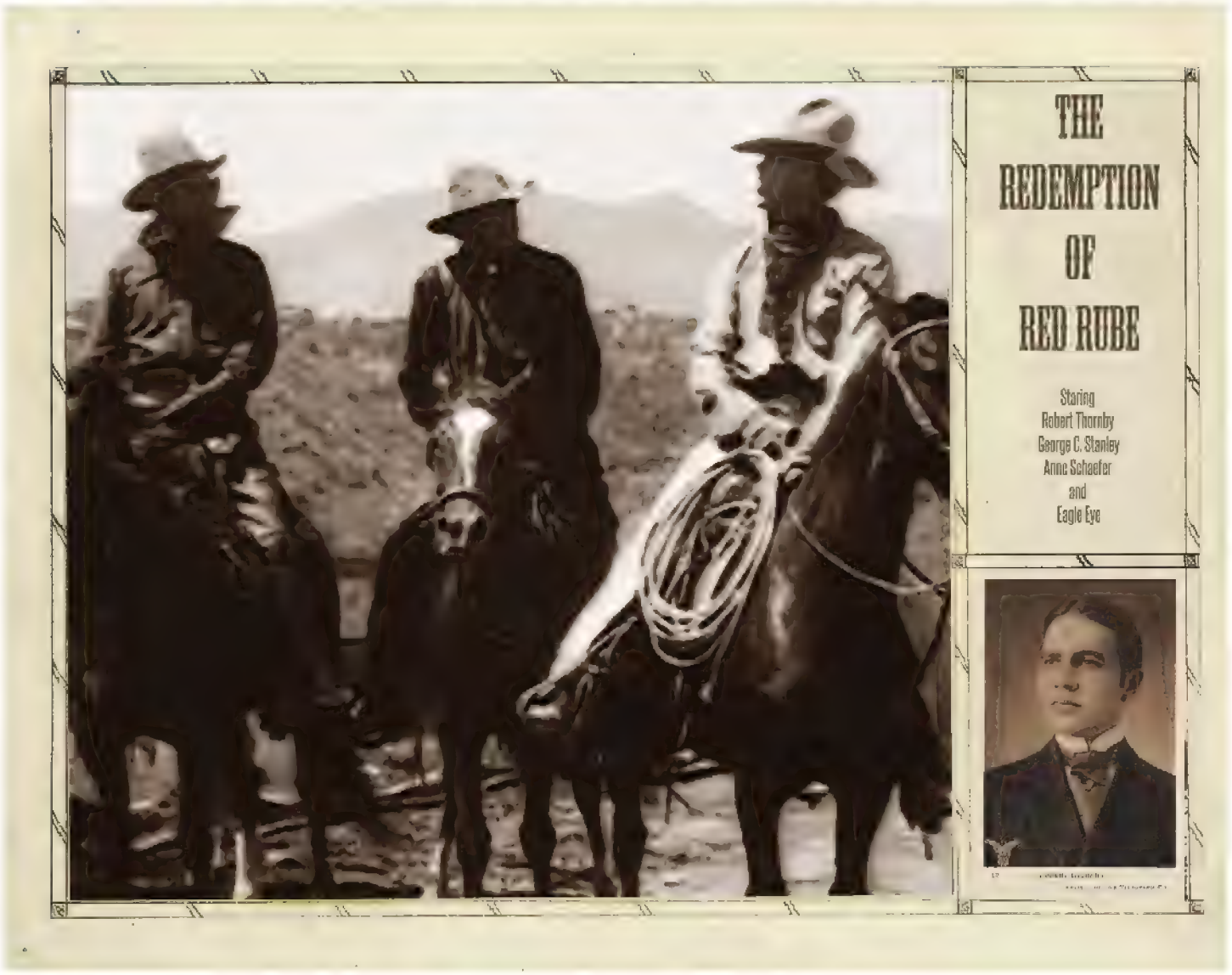
... HE FLEW AWAY !!
SAY GOOD-BYE TO THE SHIELD AND THE BLACK HOOD FOR ME !!
TAKE CARE, KIM .... AND... BE WELL !!
AND... THAT WAS THE LAST I SAW OF HIM !!

SOON...
IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE READY TO LEAVE !!


You COMIN'!??
YEAH!!
JUST ONE LAST LOOK... AT 'ARCHIE ADVENTURE-LAND'...
'59 AND '60 WERE GOOD YEARS! I'LL MISS THE PLACE!
I DID LAY THE GROUND WORK FOR A LOT OF ADVENTURES HERE!
WELL, ... GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT!!

The Name of Redemption

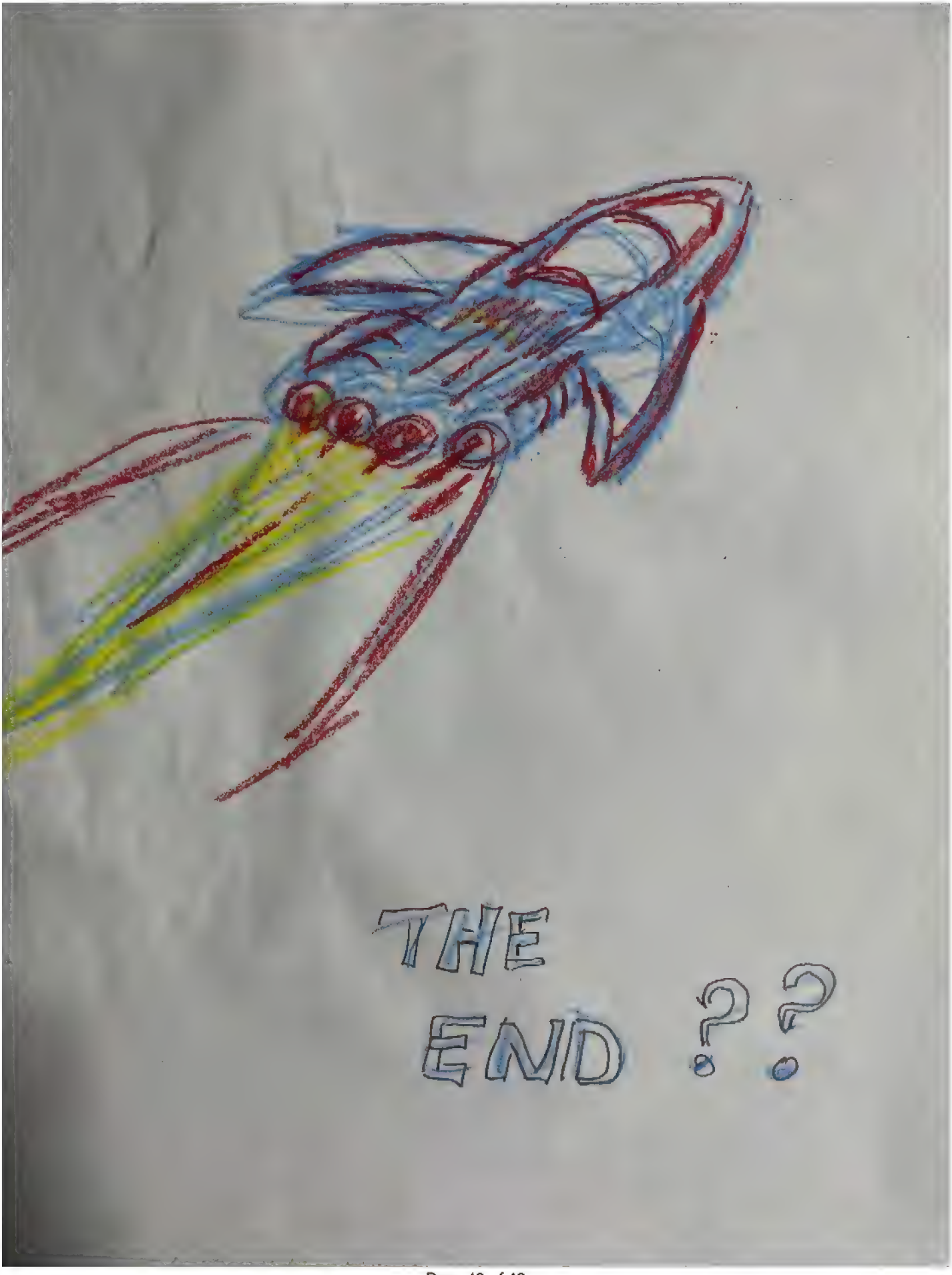
We are going to look at the parts that went into the formation of Red Rube. First the film "The Redemption of Red Rube" that gave him his name.



"The Redemption of Red Rube" was a western film from 1912, the plot is as follows...

Hurriedly making preparations to go in pursuit of "Red Rube," the outlaw, who has broken jail, Sheriff Sanders is accosted by "Spotted Snake," an Indian from the reservation, who enters his shack and abusively demands whiskey. The sheriff promptly kicks him out. The Indian swears vengeance. The sheriff takes leave of his wife and little child and starts after "Red Rube." After his departure, "Spotted Snake" returns to the sheriff's shack and orders Sanders' wife to furnish him with liquor. At the point of a rifle, she orders him off. As he leaps upon his horse, he snatches up the sheriff's little girl and rides rapidly away into the desert with her, where he leaves her to die. At Silver City, Sheriff Sanders catches up with "Red Rube." In the "Silver King's" saloon, "Rube" shoots the sheriff in the arm and flees, followed by a posse of enraged citizens, determined upon lynching him. "Rube" makes his way across the desert and comes upon the sheriff's little girl wandering aimlessly about. He knows that shooting the sheriff means lynching for him if he returns to "Silver City." The confidence of the child in him and her evident dependence placed upon his power to save her, touches his heart, and he decides to square up his career by returning the child to her parents and

WELL, OUR PILOT FINALLY ARRIVES!
DID YOU TELL HER??
NO, NOT EVERYTHING!
COME ON! LET'S GO!!

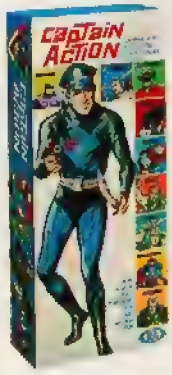

THE
END ??

ZAP!

JUST CHANGE THE OUTFIT TO CHANGE THE HERO

CAPTAIN ACTION

...can become any one of nine favorite comic strip super heroes!



3400-9 CAPTAIN ACTION FIGURE
Fully jointed, 12" high Captain Action Figure comes complete with his own unique uniform and accessories, including: lightning sword and special scabbard, gun, gun belt, removable boots and hat.
Pack per doz: 1 Weight: 10 lbs

Full-color box depicts Captain Action Figure in his nine super hero outfits

CAPTAIN ACTION 2019 TM & © CAE LLC
© 1966 MIGHTY COMICS

Who's Who THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE G-MAN UNIVERSE

facebook.com/groups/shieldgmanclub

indyplanet.com/?s=G-Man+Universe

A Whole New World of Comics!
INDYPLANET
Printed-on-Demand and Digital Download
Thousands of Comics From Hundreds of Independent Publishers
... with More Added EVERY SINGLE DAY!
THE GREATEST SELECTION OF INDEPENDENT COMICS AVAILABLE ANYWHERE EVER!
IndyPlanet.com

taking his medicine like a man. The sheriff is carried to his home, where his distracted wife tells him of the kidnapping of their child. The report is spread and the neighbors gather at Sanders' house to organize a searching party. While they are considering what course to pursue, "Red Rube" rides up and places the child in its mother's arms and surrenders himself to the sheriff. Immediately the neighbors form a Vigilante Committee and propose to lynch "Red Rube,". In spite of the sheriff's protests, they slip a rope over his head. The rescued child lifts her arms to the unfortunate man and he clasps her tenderly to his breast, while she hugs and kisses him, then she lifts the rope from his neck and casts it aside, pleading mercy for her rescuer. "Red Rube" hangs his head at the child's simple faith and trust in him. The neighbors silently steal away with tears in their eyes. The sheriff clasps the hand of "Red Rube" in gratitude.

The film was directed by Rollin S. Sturgeon
Staring Robert Thornby as Red Rube
– the Outlaw
George C. Stanley as Sheriff Saunders
Anne Schaefer as Mrs. Saunders
—the Sheriff's Wife
Eagle Eye as Spotted Snake—the Indian

Captain Blood

Next, we mix in Captain Blood. This is clearly more of a swipe than an homage.

Captain Blood was a pirate film from 1935, the plot is as follows...

Arrested during the Monmouth Rebellion and falsely convicted of treason, Dr. Peter Blood is banished to the West Indies and sold into slavery. In Port Royal, Jamaica the Governor's daughter Arabella Bishop buys him for £10 to spite her uncle, Col. Bishop who owns a major plantation. Life is hard for the men and for Blood as well. By chance, he treats the Governor's gout and is soon part of the medical service. He dreams of freedom and when the opportunity strikes, he and his friends rebel taking over a Spanish ship that has attacked the city. Soon, they are the most feared pirates on the seas, men without a country attacking all ships. When Arabella is prisoner, Blood decides to return her to Port Royal only to find that it is under the control of England's new enemy, France. All of them must decide if they are to fight for their new King.

The film was directed by Michael Curtiz
Starring Errol Flynn as Peter Blood
Olivia de Havilland as Arabella Bishop
Lionel Atwill as Colonel Bishop
Basil Rathbone as Levasseur

Captain Marvel

The final element was Captain Marvel who Robbins worked on at Fawcett

Billy Batson, a kid radio reporter for station WHIZ, can call upon the powers of six "immortal elders": Solomon, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles, and Mercury by simply shouting "SHAZAM!", which causes him to turn into the all-powerful Captain Marvel.

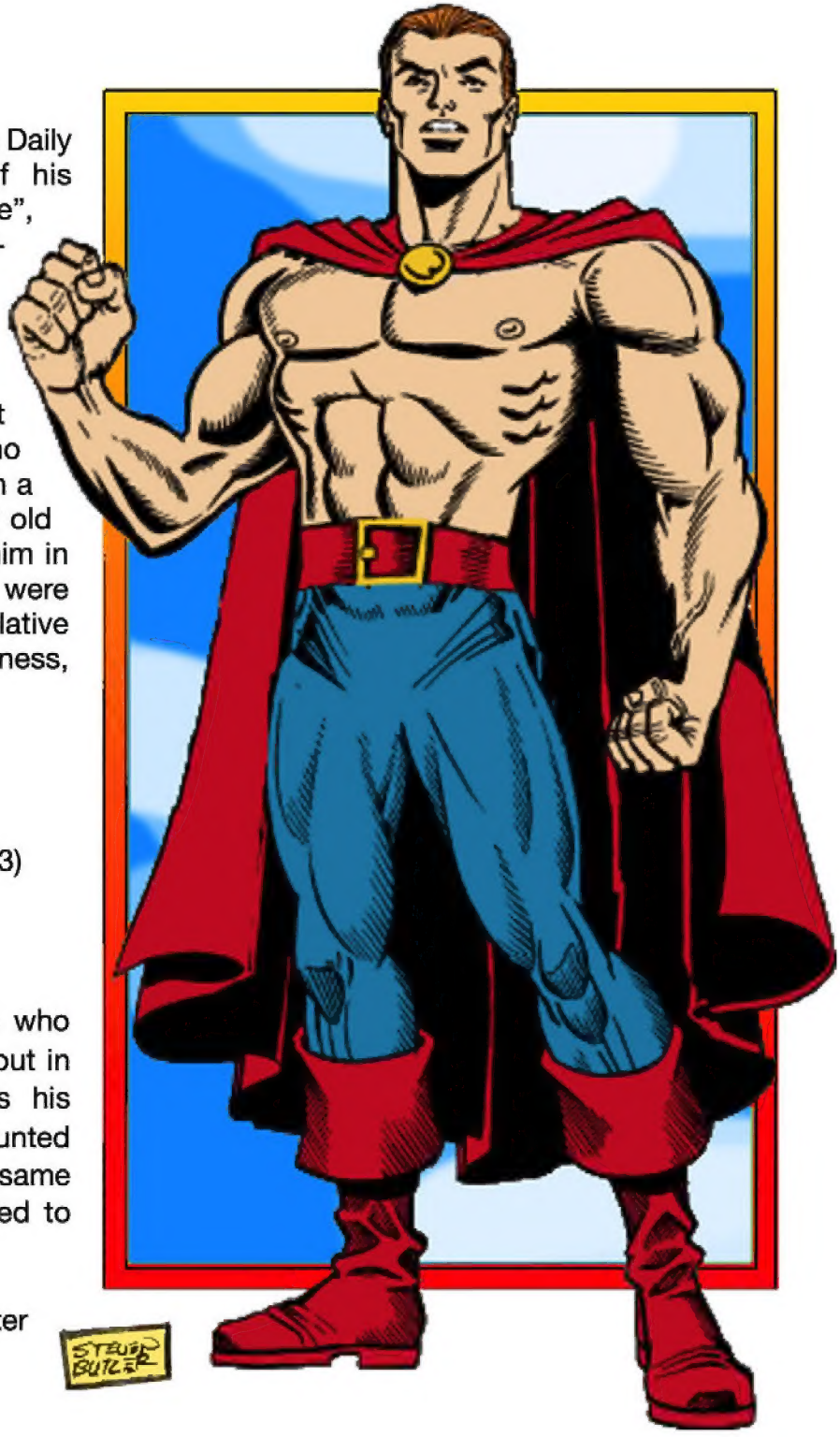
Captain Marvel was given a magical gift, whenever he shouts "SHAZAM!" he is transformed from a child into an adult Super Hero. Billy is an orphan who lived on the streets, Billy rode a magic subway car to a mysterious location. There an old man gave him a magic word that put him in touch with immortal elders. Each Immortal gave him an aspect of their greatness, together it made him superhuman.

Read Rube, Himself

This all leads to Red Rube.

Reuben Reuben, a cub reporter for the Daily Sun, can call upon the powers of his ancestors by simply shouting "Hey Rube", which causes him to turn into the all-powerful Red Rube.

Red Rube was given a magical gift, whenever he shouts "HEY RUBE!" he is transformed from a child into an adult Super Hero. Reuben is an orphan who ran away from the orphanage and hid in a Castle on top of a nearby hill. There an old man gave him a magic elixir that put him in touch with his ancestors all of whom were also named Reuben Reubens. Each relative gave him an aspect of their greatness, together it made him superhuman.



RED RUBE WHO'S WHO

Real Name Rueben Rueben
First Appearance Zip Comics #39 (1943)
Created by Ed Robbins

Origin

Rueben Rueben was a young orphan who ran away from the orphanage. He hid out in an old castle but discovered it was his ancestor's home. His ancestors still haunted the castle as ghosts, all sharing the same name as their descendants, and wanted to help him.

Rueben later became a cub reporter for the Daily Sun.

Powers and Abilities

The ghosts each gave him the powers they possessed in life: strength, wisdom, speed, invulnerability, and courage. All he needed to do to use these powers was call out "Hey Rube" and he would transform into Red Rube, a fully grown hero.

Appearances

Zip Comics #39-47
Roly Poly Comics #10—Canadian version
Weekender vol. 1 #1, 3—Canadian cover only

(GASP!)

or

How a science-fiction movie from 1958 led to my becoming a fan of Golden Age MLJ Comics!

by Gary McCullough

I was very pleased when Rik asked me to prepare an article for this MLJ Fanzine. Not knowing any of the individuals who might come to read this, however, I was left to puzzle over what exactly my subject matter should be and how I should go about writing it. I finally decided to compose a wistful account of the journey I took to become a fan of the MLJ books, in hopes that, among my reminiscences, readers might find something to which they could relate, or, perhaps, discover an item or two that had informational value. At the very least, I hope that readers will enjoy some of the illustrations that accompany the article.

To begin at the beginning, I was born in 1950, which likely makes me one of the older members of Rik's revived Shield G-Man Club. I spent the first ten years of my life in Newburgh, New York, a rather old burg, really, located along the Hudson River some fifteen miles north of West Point and about fifty miles north of the Big Apple. My dad enjoyed spending time with me—I was his only son—and as he was a big fan of movies, it was only natural that he would take me to the local theaters—walk-ins and drive-ins—on a regular basis. With few exceptions, a night at the movies meant two feature films, and I was raised on a steady diet of westerns, crime dramas, mysteries, comedies, musicals, and historical dramatizations. I liked all genres, but my two favorites were horror and science-fiction films.

In 1958, I had the good fortune to view THE FLY, which totally engrossed me as an eight-year-old boy! Most readers, I imagine, are familiar with the movie—David Hedison plays the role of Andre Delambre, a well-intentioned scientist who is obsessed with the idea of the transference of matter. His experiments lead to the construction of two teleportation chambers located some twenty feet apart from each other in his basement laboratory. After successfully transferring inanimate objects from one chamber to the other, Delambre makes the mistake of trying the process out on a human being—himself. The experiment goes terribly awry when a house fly enters the same chamber as Delambre at the same time. The molecules of both the man and the insect dematerialize, only to reform moments later in the other chamber, but with horrifying results—the atoms are mixed, and Delambre now has the head of a fly! The posters for the film had pictures of Delambre's wife, played by Patricia Owens, screaming in fear, and the tag line read "If she looked upon the horror her husband had become, she would scream for the rest of her life!"

Needless to say, there was at least one young boy in the audience who was at least as terrified as she was. The movie left quite an impression on me—it still ranks as one of my all-time favorites, and it established co-star Vincent Price as a favorite actor of mine. From this film forward, if Vincent Price was featured in a movie, I made it a point to go see it. Trivia: The short story upon which *The Fly* was based was written by George Langelaan; it was first published in *Playboy*, which proves that at least some people really did buy that magazine for the articles!

I had many other interests to occupy my time when I wasn't watching movies; one of them, of course, was reading comics. Once again, I was exposed to a variety of genres—westerns, war, teen humor, and science-fiction—and a lot of comics based on TV series: Walt Disney's *Zorro* was a particular favorite of mine. I also read a number of comics about super-heroes—Batman, Superman, The Flash, and Green Lantern—but, honestly, I really didn't care too much for them. I did like the Mark Merlin supernatural adventures in DC's *House of Secrets*, and naturally I enjoyed the Atlas science-fiction and fantasy titles—*Journey into Mystery*,

Tales of Suspense, *Tales to Astonish*, and *Strange Tales*. But everything changed one day in the spring of 1960 when I discovered *Adventures of the Fly #6*.

Because of the title, I thought the book might have a connection to the movie I had seen some eighteen months earlier, but I quickly learned that the character in the comic bore no resemblance to the character in the film. I was perfectly okay with that, because the hero of the book completely captivated me. It was probably a good thing that I hadn't come across the title earlier than I did, because I might not have been as taken with the interpretation of the character in those early issues. I will discuss the Fly's original stories in detail later in this article. For the time being, suffice it to say that, with *Fly #6*, the editors made significant changes to the hero that made him very appealing to me. The Fly became "Master of the Insect World," which meant that he not only could fly like his namesake, or see in virtually every direction, but he could also mimic the natural abilities of any insect. As a result, as the hero encountered various difficulties from story to story, he employed an imaginative variety of ways to deal with the situation: like a firefly, he could generate blinding light; like a cricket, he could create a deafening noise by beating his wings together; like an earthworm, he could dig through the ground; like a caterpillar, he could spin a cocoon, either as protection or to restrain an adversary; like an ant, he had tremendous strength. He could also communicate with all varieties of insects telepathically and order them to do his bidding. Lastly, he was armed with a "buzz gun" that emitted sonic vibrations that caused temporary paralysis. His primary weakness was being rendered helpless when confronted with chloroform.

Not only did all these fantastic abilities cause me to take interest in the character, but there was something different about the look of the comic, too. The artwork had a *look* to it that was much different than what I saw in other comics. Even the *paper* the comic was printed on looked and felt a bit different. Many years later, I learned that the artist was John Giunta.

Giunta is not a particularly well-known artist and I've found relatively little information about him. His work can be found here and there in Golden Age comics, but it doesn't appear that he made a career working solely in that medium. He likely did a lot of illustrations for pulp magazines. Apparently his first comic book work was in *Amazing Man* #s 7–11, in which he did the art for the Magician from Mars series. He worked at various times for Harry A. Chesler, Fawcett, and Bailey Comics. In 1944, while Giunta was working for Bailey, the company assigned him an art assistant, a sixteen-year-old high school student named Frank Frazetta. Giunta did cover art for several one-shot books, among them *Captain Wizard*, *Gem*, *Gold Medal*, *Hurricane*, *Jeep*, *Spook*, and *Top-Spot*. He did the cover art for *Mad Hatter* #1 and the lead Mad Hatter story in the second and final issue. He also did the cover for *Roly Poly* #10, signing the art "Jay Gee." Printed by Green Publishing, this comic reprinted stories *from* Zip # 41.

In the 1950s, Giunta drew the two "Crom the Barbarian" stories printed in *Strange Worlds*, published by Avon. During the decade, Giunta did occasional stories for Harvey, Atlas, and DC. After his stint with Archie Comics in the early sixties, the bulk of his remaining comic work was found in *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*, for which he drew Dynamo, Menthor, and Noman stories, and a T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Squad story in *Dynamo #1* in which agent Weed thinks he has acquired super powers. Tower Comics seemed a good fit for Giunta, which employed the talents of such other Golden Age comic artists as Mike Sekowsky, Chic Stone, George Tuska, Gil Kane, and, of course, Wally Wood. Although he had done a couple of western stories for Atlas in the fifties, I believe the only work Giunta did for Marvel in the sixties was to ink the Bob Powell Giant-Man story that ran in *Tales To Astonish #69*, published in 1965. Giunta died of heart failure in 1970.

Returning to *Adventures of the Fly*, for the first time in my life, there was a comic book character that actually excited me, and I wanted to read more of his stories. I eagerly searched for another issue of this title to appear on the comic rack. Two months later, I was rewarded with *Adventures of the Fly #7*.

The lead story in this issue was "The Haunted Yacht," an atmospheric, seven-page supernatural adventure that remains to this day one of the most enjoyable comic book stories I've ever read. I make it a point to re-read it at least once a year. The feature story, however, was "The Fly Meets the Black Hood," in which The Fly